

# The Message of 2 Peter

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*The second letter of 2 Peter emphasizes the responsibility that rests upon those who are in grace, highlighting the importance of appropriation of resources and avoidance of perils to live a life of holy living and godliness.*

**Scripture:** 2 Peter 1:3

**Topics:** "Grace and Responsibility", "Anticipation of Christ's Coming"

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## Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the message of 2 Peter, focusing on the responsibilities that come with grace. He explains that believers are endowed with divine power and resources for life and godliness, which necessitate a diligent response to avoid spiritual perils. The sermon highlights the importance of remembrance and anticipation of Christ's coming, urging individuals and the church to live in a way that reflects their faith and readiness for His return. Morgan warns against the dangers of denying Christ and His second coming, which can lead to spiritual blindness and moral decay. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to grow in grace and to actively cooperate with God's power in developing character.

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## Transcript

### A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

#### I. The Central Teaching. Responsibilities of Grace

##### i. Resources creating Responsibility.

##### a. The Power. i. 3.

1. Things for Life according to His Glory.

2. Things for Godliness according to His Virtue.

##### b. The Coming. i. 4 and 11.

1. The final Escape from Corruption.

2. Entrance into the eternal Kingdom.

##### ii. Responsibilities created by Resource.

a. Appropriation of the Resources.

1. Remembrance.

2. Response.

b. Avoidance of the Perils.

1. Test the Prophets.

2. Holy Living and Godliness.

II. The Abiding Appeal. Give Diligence

i. In Cooperation with the Power. i. 5.

a. Faith appropriating Power.

b. Diligence developing Character.

ii. In View of the Coming. iii. 14.

a. Faith looking for the Coming.

b. Diligence guarding Character.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. To the Individual

i. Relation to the Power.

Remembrance in order to Diligence.

ii. Relation to the Coming.

Anticipation in order to Realization.

II. To the Church

i. Her only Perils.

a. Denying the Master. ii. 1.

b. Denying the Coming iii. 4.

ii. The Inter-Relation a these.

To deny Him is to deny His Coming.

iii. The Issue of these.

Near-sightedness.

Lust.

Destruction.

The main purpose of this second letter, like that of the first, is the establishment of believers in their faith and in their life. Both were undoubtedly written in fulfillment of the charge of the Lord Jesus to Peter; "When once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren."

The first letter was written to "the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" ; and the opening words of the third chapter of the second epistle lead us to believe that it was written to the same people. In each case the method is the same, although the apostle was dealing with different difficulties. In the former, he dealt with perils threatening the spiritual life of the Church from without. In this, he dealt with perils threatening the spiritual life of the individual believer from within.

There is a sense in which this second letter touches a deeper note than the first. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it has a more searching effect; its note is deeper, in the sense that it deals with us personally, individually, whereas the first presented to us in a more general way the great and sublime truth of the sufficiency of that grace wherein we stand. Grace is sufficient; that was the theme of the first letter. That is still the message; but now it is insisted on that grace is only sufficient as its laws are obeyed. No man has any right to say God's grace is sufficient to keep him if he is breaking the laws of grace, and so putting himself in peril. God's grace is not sufficient to keep a man from falling who is not obedient to the law of that grace, and to the revealed will of God. The first letter began " Grace to you and peace be multiplied," and ended "Stand ye fast therein." The second letter begins, " Grace to you and peace be multiplied," and ends "Grow in the grace." The same beginning in each case reminds us of the fountainhead and the flowing river. The final word of the first is, "Stand ye fast therein," that is, live in Emmanuel's land, watered and fertilized by this great flowing river of grace. The last word of the second letter is "Grow in the grace," that is, being in the land, appropriate its resources and grow. It is not enough to abide, to stand fast; there must also be growth. In the first epistle the burden is that of the sufficiency of grace, and the consequent first responsibility of standing fast. In the second letter the burden is that of the responsibility which the fact of being in grace creates.

This must be clear. The great burden of the first letter is the sufficiency of grace; grace in every time of need; ending with the one note indicating responsibility, "Stand ye fast therein." The burden of the second letter takes for granted the burden of the first, that grace is sufficient, and sets forth the responsibility that rests upon those who are in grace, revealing two grave perils forever threatening the life of those in grace. While its burden is that of responsibility, and while it ends with the note which insists upon responsibility, "Ye therefore . . . grow in the grace" ; the thought of this last word is also that of sufficiency, as it really means, being in the grace, grow; you are in the grace, God has put you in His grace, you are in the land watered by the river of His grace, therefore grow.

Let us then consider the essential message of this second letter as to its central teaching; and as to its abiding appeal.

The central teaching has to do with the responsibilities of grace; first, the resource creating the responsibilities, and secondly the responsibilities created by that resource.

After the introduction in the first two verses, the apostle wrote: "Seeing that His divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that called us by His own glory and virtue." An interpretation of this letter must be sought in the light of the mount of transfiguration. If that be borne in mind, this declaration immediately becomes full of meaning. The central thought is that of Divine power. This power grants us "all the things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that called us by His own glory and virtue." Put the things of grace which are there referred to, "glory and virtue," against the things for which power is provided, "life and godliness," and it is at once seen that they are mutually explanatory. The Divine power being at our disposal, we have everything that is necessary for life, according to His glory; and for godliness, according to His virtue.

His glory these men had seen on the holy mount. What they saw was not the outshining of the Deity of our Lord, but the coming to final perfection of His humanity. Deity has never had that kind of outshining. Deity has no manifestation to the eyes of sense. When God hid Himself in flesh, then men saw God; the glory of Deity was revealed not in any splendour, but in the humanity of our Lord. That humanity came to its perfection on the holy mount. The story of the life of Jesus may be told thus; innocent in babyhood and childhood; holy in youth and manhood; coming to ultimate glory on the mount of transfiguration. There humanity was revealed at its highest and best.

It was glory, but it was also virtue; that is, it was not merely what life was in itself, inherently, in its perfection, but it was the fact that that life was filled with every excellency which made God declare, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."

The word virtue here has not the meaning which it usually has when we make use of it. We recall the great passage in the first letter, "Ye are . . . that ye may show forth the excellencies," "the praises," as the Authorized Version has it. The word excellencies or praises is exactly the same word as virtue. Virtue refers there to that in Him which was excellent, that in Him which satisfied the heart of God.

His Divine power has given us all that we need, in order that life may come to the pattern of that glory; and that godliness may be the realization of that virtue. These are the resources of His power.

Then there are the resources of His coming. These are also referred to in the first chapter; "Whereby He hath granted unto us His precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust." "For thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." "The eternal Kingdom" is an arresting phrase, and this is the only occasion in the New Testament in which it is used. In this letter the subject of the Second Advent is not dealt with as it is in some of the other writings of the New Testament. The main thought of the apostle is not that the Second Advent will mean the setting up of the Kingdom of God in this world, but that it will result in the perfecting of the saints. We should always draw a distinction between the Coming of the Lord and the Day of the Lord, that day of judgment ushering in the reign of righteousness. The apostle is here dealing with the value of the Coming to the saint. In that Coming we shall finally, perfectly escape from the corruption that is in the world by lust. In that Coming we shall enter into the age-abiding Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Here again is the resource provided for us in grace. If I stand in grace, I have power sufficient to conform my life to the perfect pattern of His life, so that it shall be well pleasing to God. If I stand in grace I stand in the light of the Parousia, the Presence, the Coming; which for the world will lead to His process of judgment establishing righteousness ; but which for me, standing in grace, will be the hour when I finally

escape from corruption. There is a sense in which every believer has already escaped in the economy and purpose of God; but in the hour of that Coming, that Advent at which scoffers are still scoffing, we shall finally escape from corruption. This corruptible must put on incorruption. Then shall be brought to pass the word that is written. That is the final outcome of our Christian life; and we lose a very great deal if we forget or neglect, as a part of the resources of grace, the presence or coming of our Lord.

What then are the responsibilities which these resources create? They can be expressed in two words; appropriation of the resources; and avoidance of the perils.

Two words will indicate the method of appropriation; first remembrance, and secondly, response. In proportion as we forget the beginning we are in danger of wandering from the pathway that leads to the end. It is an ill day in my Christian life when I do not remember my Lord's death, and that Cross from which I receive the benefit of my life. There is a great value in the Lord's command, "This do in remembrance of Me." When gathering about the table, one of our first responsibilities is that there we remember the beginning of our Christian life by His atonement; and we must keep our life day by day set in relation to these things, the first things. But we are to remember not only the first things, but also the ultimate things. When I forget the ultimate, forget the Coming, then my life becomes careless. I am perfectly sure that Dr. Denny is right when he says in his volume on Thessalonians that the very bloom of the beauty of the Christian communion in the early days was that of their ever expecting the return of the Lord; and I believe he is perfectly right when he says that the measure in which the Church has lost that expectation is the measure in which the bloom of that beauty has been brushed from her character. By remembrance of these things, I appropriate them.

But infinitely more is needed. If I remember them only as an intellectual exercise, there is no value in that. I must respond to them. Remembering the Cross and what it means with regard to sin, I am to put sin away and yield myself to its inspiration for service. Remembering the Advent, His return, then "what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God?" So, resources are to be appropriated by remembrance and response.

That necessarily involves the second thought, avoidance of the perils. The solemnity and searching power of the second chapter are great. There is no pity in the heart of this man for false prophets; for very love of truth, there cannot be. He warns against the false prophets; and in the next chapter he charges them that they "remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets." How are we to avoid the perils? By remembering the truth, the messages of the prophets, of the Lord Himself, of the apostles. We are to test prophecy by the established prophecies of essential truth. We are to avoid the peril of evil living that grows out of listening to false prophets, by all holy living and godliness resulting from obedience to the holy prophets.

The abiding appeal of the letter is that we give diligence. This we do first by cooperation with the Power. "Adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge temperance; and in your temperance patience; and in your patience godliness; and in your godliness love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren love." First faith appropriates power; then diligence develops the character which is potentially taken hold of by faith. Faith is the first thing. Faith appropriates the Divine power. The Divine power has put all things at my disposal, and faith appropriates that power. That is not enough. I am to give diligence to supply. That process is described through the flowering of faith, until the fruit is reached, which is love. The figure is that of the opening flower. The root principle is faith taking hold of the resources of power; then we see the flower open; until we get at last to

the fruit, love. If we want to know what love is, we leave Peter and go to Paul, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance." In order to that development from faith to love, cultivation is needed; self-cultivation, and diligence withal. It is perfectly true we grow; and it is perfectly true that not by effort can we grow, not by taking thought can we add one cubit to our stature even spiritually; but it is equally true that we are to be diligent in adding, not adding to, as though we got from somewhere else a new quality ; but bringing out the thing that is already there; reaching down into the Divine power until all the petals of the perfect flower are unfolded, and until the fruit itself is formed, which is love.

The appeal of the letter goes farther. We are to give diligence, not only to cooperate with power, but also in view of the Coming. "Seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in His sight." Just as we saw faith appropriating power, now we see faith looking for the Coming. It is faith and nothing else that looks for the Coming. The scoffers are always present, saying: "Where is the promise of His coming?" As things have been, so they will remain. Faith looks up, and expects the fulfillment of the sure word of prophecy. Faith is certain that what God has spoken He will do. Faith does not attempt to explain away the prophecies of the Old Testament as though they had happened, when most evidently they have not happened. Faith looks and expects, and affirms that though there be no flush of dawn to the eyes of sense, He is coming, and the day is coming in which the elements shall melt away with fervent heat.

I speak out of my own experience. Unless I looked for that coming I would be of all men the most miserable, and the most hopeless. In this matter God is working as He always has worked, through processes leading to crises. Faith is looking for the coming, and it must give diligence that in the crisis we may be found in peace, without spot, and blameless in His sight.

That is the abiding appeal. Give diligence with regard to the power, to cooperate with it for the development of character. Give diligence with regard to the Coming, to look for it and to guard character so that at any moment to quote from John for the illumination of Peter -we may not be ashamed from Him at His Coming.

The application of the letter to the individual is first that it reveals the law of relation to that Divine power which is at his disposal in Christ; remembrance in order to diligence, remembrance the inspiration of diligence. To forget is to become negligent; to remember is to be forever more diligent.

It also reveals the law of relation to the coming; anticipation in order to realization. If I really anticipate His coming, if I really live so that I may be ready when He comes-how the thought touches all life-if I really believe He may disturb me at my work, or worship, or play, then I shall work and worship and play so as not to be ashamed when He comes. If we have lost that, how much we have lost.

The application of this letter to the Church is first that it reveals her only perils. The first is that of denial of the Master. "There arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." Denying the Master; His glory and His virtue, those essentials concerning Him which were revealed to Peter and the Church for all time upon the holy mount. Denying all that He is in Himself, denying that which was the central subject of the converse of the holy mount, the exodus, not death, but the fact that through death He would break a highway into life. The second peril is that of denying His coming; "In the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own

lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." When the Church joins in the mockery of the mocker, and denies the prophetic utterance of the Scriptures, and the definite declarations of the Lord and His apostles, then she is in peril, for to lose the sense of His coming is to lose the most powerful force and inspiration for holy living.

The inter-relation of these perils is manifest. To deny Him in any sense is to deny His coming. To deny Him by making Him merely a moral exemplar is to doubt the saving value of His death, and to deny His resurrection ; and to deny the resurrection is to deny His Second Advent.

The issue of such denial is near-sightedness, seeing only the things that are near. This issues in lust. And lust brings forth death.

The note of the letter is one of great solemnity, I had almost said severity; but it is the severity of a great love and a great desire for the strengthening of believers. Let us ever hear its great words to us; In remembrance, give diligence. Grace is sufficient; but we must discover and obey its laws, or it is valueless.

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