

Title: The Equality Act
Text: 2 Peter 1:1-2
Theme: An equal standing faith
Series: 2 Peter
Prop Stmtnt: Our ultimate identity is our position in Christ

2 Peter, Jude, 2 and 3 John are the most neglected books in the NT, so we are studying them in order to change that, at least for us. Most likely, Jude was written first, then 2 Peter, then 2 and 3 John so I am preaching them in that order. Jude clearly wrote with a Jewish audience in mind, and therefore, we assume that his intended audience was the believers who lived primarily in Israel. 2 Peter was one of two books written by Peter. Peter likely died during the reign of Nero who himself died in 68 A.D. Nero's persecution of Christians intensified from the time of the burning of the city of Rome (64 A.D.) until the time of his death. We tend to think that it was in this span that Peter was executed. Since Peter anticipates his death to be very soon (v.14) it is likely that this letter was written from prison in Rome and since this was his second letter (3.1) to the same people, then we now understand why he did not identify his audience. He already did that in his first letter.

In his first letter, Peter identifies himself as Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Here he adds a bit more. "*Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.*" Peter identifies himself and his audience. Here is how I see me and here is how I see you. That is verse 1.

I. **Who are you?** (1)

A. **Simeon Peter**

Simeon is the Semitic form of the name Simon. Peter means rock and Jesus certainly saw the potential in this man to be a rock and a leader in the church. Peter was not only chosen and called by Christ to be an apostle, but he was part of the leadership team of the disciples. Peter along with James and John were called to be the leaders of the leaders. And of these 3, Peter was the leader of them. That is why his name is listed first: Peter, James and John. Peter was the one who on behalf of the 12 confessed and declared that Jesus was the Messiah, and the Son of the Living God. Peter was the one who walked on water. Peter, James and John saw the transfiguration of Christ. Peter and John were with Christ for a time during his trial, though Peter infamously denied Christ. On Resurrection Day it was Peter and John who went to the empty tomb. Peter was restored by Christ and Peter was the one who used the keys that he was given to preach the gospel in the Temple area on the Day of Pentecost that opened up the door for 3,000 Jews to come to faith in Christ, get baptized and become members of the church. On that day, the local church and the universal church were one and the same. Peter and John healed a lame beggar one day near the Temple and ended up being arrested and put in jail. That night, they were miraculously set free only to return to the Temple where they continued to preach and were arrested again. A little while later, James was arrested and executed. Then Peter was arrested and sentenced to die, but the night before he was to die, he was once again, set free. Peter was the apostle who used the key to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles when the Lord sent him to the home of Cornelius the Roman Centurion. Paul is the focal point of the second half of the book of Acts, but the first half is all about Peter. Needless to say, Peter has an impressive

resume. A lot has happened since the remaining 11 disciples looked at each other in stunned disbelief following the ascension of Jesus. The spread of the gospel has resulted in the planting of churches all over the Roman Empire and Peter was a big part of it. So, Peter, who are you? How does he see himself?

i. Slave (of Jesus Christ)

The word that is translated servant (doulos) is the word for slave. Peter identifies himself as one who has no inherent authority. He has no rights. He is under authority. But, at the same time, a slave could also be a position of honor. Let me explain: Imagine that you lived in the 1st century world, like in the city of Corinth and you were orphaned at a young age and you lived on the streets and survived by begging, stealing, sometimes working, hustling others, doing whatever you had to do just to eat. You were not a slave, but life was certainly not easy. One day, your petty crimes caught up with you and you were arrested and sold into slavery. That sounded like the worst thing ever. However, your owner had a large estate out away from the city and he gave you a place to stay, clothes to wear, a place to wash up, food to eat, all in return for working for him a fair job. It didn't take you long to realize that this was a pretty good deal and life here on the estate was way better than life in the streets and you made up your mind not to mess this up and you didn't. As time went on, you earned more of your owner's trust and favor and what is more, there was another slave who you had your eye on that he gave to you to marry. So, here you are now, you are married you have a child, you have a home, you have job and because of the status of your owner, you are respected, not because you are a slave, but because you are his slave.

One day, your owner sends you back to the city to conduct some official business for him where you run into a couple of old childhood friends. One look at you and one look at them makes it clear that your slavery was the best thing that happened to you. Not because it was slavery, but because of your owner. Before Peter identified himself as anything else, he called himself a slave of Jesus Christ. This is an expression of humility and honor. And, beloved, that is what we are. Genuine followers of Christ give up the right to rule their own lives. We hand the keys to Jesus.

But, Peter is likely in prison and anticipates his imminent death. In view of that, this term speaks volumes. I am the Lord's. I am not my own. He determines my steps. He determines my days. If he wants me in prison, so be it. If he wants me to face hardship, so be it. I am the Lord's. That is what it means to follow the Lord. Jesus is Lord! Not just Lord in title, but in reality. Lord who is in charge. Lord, who calls, ordains, commands, directs and demands. And yet, this is the Lord who died for me. If he died for me, then every command, direction and demand is only going to come from a heart of love and for a sovereign plan that is nothing short of stupendous. Peter was also an apostle.

ii. Apostle (of Jesus Christ)

The word apostle can be used in a general sense or in a specific sense. The word means "one who is sent with a message." In that sense, every genuine Christian is an apostle. We are all on a mission and sent with a message. But, Peter is specifically named by Christ as an apostle in Mark 3 and Matthew 10. The office of apostle was a temporary office given for establishing the

founding of the church (Ephesians 2.20). Peter was an apostle and therefore, he had apostolic authority. Peter likely used this title to remind his audience that what he is writing to them has authority that ultimately comes from Christ. There will be some things that Peter says that are hard to hear, but they are necessary to hear. Peter has an authority and he has to use it. He has a message and it has to be delivered.

B. Those in the faith

The second part of verse 1 describes the believers who will be reading this letter as “*those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours.*” We tend to think about the faith of others as being a little different than ours, especially that of people that we look up to. If Peter were somehow able to be here this morning, I would not be preaching, right. And neither would I be telling him to aim for 11.30ish. After all, this is Peter. Brother, you go all day if you need to. And while Peter has experiences that are truly fascinating that we would love to hear him talk about, the truth is, his faith is of equal standing to yours. The ground is level _____ (at the foot of the cross). His position in Christ is just as secure as yours. The salvation that he enjoys as a follower of Christ is the same as yours.

I believe that this phrase is very important in helping us understand what is in store for us in the rest of this book. This letter, like the letter from Jude is full of warning about the influence of false teachers and leaders in the church. Let me start with a few overlapping observations:

- Things of value invite imposters and counterfeits.

Diamonds are valuable, and there are a lot of fakes. We are not tempted to spend too much money on fake weeds or fake garbage. We don't worry about people stealing our garbage and reselling it on Facebook marketplace.

- Things of value are often misunderstood.

Can you look at a diamond and know if it's for real or know its value? Years ago a man in the church (who is with the Lord now, so I can tell this story) gave me Rolex watch. He said that someone gave it to him and he didn't want it and wanted me to have it. I didn't know what to do. I thanked him for it because he was being generous, but what am I going to do with that? And what is worse, I took it to a jeweler who said that it wasn't genuine. It was a good fake, but it was a fake. There is a lot of value in Christianity and there is a lot of misunderstanding with it, which provides plenty of opportunities for counterfeiters to have influence.

- Religion and Christianity deal with ultimate issues (i.e. things that have the highest value)

What is more valuable than eternal life? What is more valuable than having your sins forgiven, having a right standing before God? What is more valuable than knowing where you will spend eternity? Nothing! But, people generally do not know the truth about these things and they live with a nagging sense of fear. What is going to happen to me? Europe is full of church buildings that were paid for by wealthy donors who were getting toward the end of life and wanted to get an eternal life insurance policy, so they paid for a church to be built in order to guarantee that

their sins would be forgiven. Sadly, the religious system encouraged this and pretended that people could pay for their sins by making huge contributions to the church. It is exploitation.

- People are exceedingly vulnerable when they are fearful.

Boulder, Colorado is a long way away from us (so it seems). But, if someone walked into one of our local grocery stores and killed 10 people, we might all be ordering our groceries on-line for a few weeks, right? Who would have thought that most of our nation would put masks on their faces or lock themselves tight in their homes? But a global pandemic reveals the level of fear that people have and when that nerve is exposed, most people will change behavior in ways we couldn't imagine. So, let's put this together.

Because Christianity deals with ultimate value, it attracts imposters who will leverage people's ignorance and fear in order to exploit them for selfish purposes. In this letter, Peter identifies some of the common characteristics of these imposters and false teachers who get influence in the church. Imposters and false teachers only have influence IF the people in the church give them a hearing and give them influence. One of the common characteristics of imposters is the idea or the notion or impression that they possess knowledge, insight, power, secrets, special revelation that common folk don't. Don't question him, he is a man of God. Oh no! If he really is a man of God you should not only question him, but he will be okay with it. The idea that the leader or leaders live according to a different set of rules than you do is wrong and disastrous and gives them a perception of authority and a lack of accountability.

So, how do we protect the church from the fact that imposters will come? There are two ways: 1) We talk about it. Not in order to create a culture of suspicion and distrust, or to act like we are the only ones doing it right (which is not true). But, we need to be honest with reality so that we are aware. I certainly know that preaching through Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John is a bit unusual. These books tend to be ignored because they are hard and yet they are necessary. 2) It is essential that our teaching and preaching be more theological than it is emotional or simply motivational. Now, I think that good theology is very emotional and very motivational, but we have to be a church that encourages good thinking and good reasoning so that there is a good foundation for the right emotional responses. Cotton candy may feel good in the moment, but you can't run a marathon on it. When the membership of a church is theologically fed, then it will be less likely to give oxygen to an imposter and if one arises, they will know what to do.

So, in this introduction Peter is applying a theological reality that ties all of this together. I am a servant of Jesus Christ. I am also an apostle of Jesus Christ. However, the fact that I have an office that is different than you simply means that I have a role to play in the church just like you have a role to play in the church. But the fact that we may have different roles does not mean that I am inherently better than you or you are to me. We have obtained a faith of equal standing.

People like to talk about someone being strong in their faith or weak in their faith or new in their faith, right? That is NOT what Peter is referring to here. He is not talking about the intensity of, or the maturity of, or the depth of your belief. He is talking about the fact that you believe. You, like him believe in Christ. You have obtained a faith of equal standing. How did you do that? Did you find a good deal on faith one day and you bought it? Did you find some faith on the side

of the road that someone had thrown out their car window? Did your parents leave you some in their will? Did you get it because you worked for it? Where did you get the faith to believe in Jesus? It came from God! That is exactly what Jesus was telling Nicodemus in John 3 when he told him that he had to be born again and Nicodemus wondered how he could do that. And Jesus said, you can't. The Spirit does it. Paul said that we sin has rendered us spiritually dead. We do not have eyes to see the gospel or ears to hear it. But, the Spirit gives the gift of faith through the hearing of God's Word. (Romans 10.17) Faith is a gift of grace. I believe in Christ because of God's grace. Grace means to be given something that I do not deserve. I have been given the gift of faith and so have you and so has Peter. None of us deserve it. None of us paid for it. None of us are worthy of it. None of us would have believed in Jesus on our own. But, here we are. All of us are rebels in our own right and deserving of God's judgment are not under God's wrath but under God's grace because Jesus died on the cross in our place and when we BELIEVED in Jesus, we were credited with his righteousness and forgiven of our sin. We were given the gift of faith to accept this salvation and as a result of believing we were given this salvation that can never be taken away. This is true for Jews, Gentiles, Asians, Africans, Europeans and Heinz 57 mutts like me. It is true for rich, poor, middle class, slave, free, male, female, old and young. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. There is no special class. There is no inner circle. There is no secret club. There are no special powers and keys to prosperity. We have obtained a faith of equal standing with Peter and with everyone else because faith is a gift given by God's grace. This is the ultimate equality act. Jesus did it. And the death of Christ is the reason why God is so gracious to us. This gift of saving faith has been purchased for us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Oh, beloved, this is SO good. We obtain this salvation by faith because Jesus secured it and the reason why Jesus secured it is because he is God. Look at the end of v.1. The grammar undeniably calls Jesus, God. This is as clear of a statement on the deity of Christ as you will find. There are others, plenty of others, and this is as clear and straightforward as it can be. Jesus is not a created being. Jesus is God. As God he is eternal. That is why Jesus can give you eternal life. He is eternal. If Jesus was not God, then he would not be infinite and if he was not infinite then the price that he paid for sin would have a finite value to it. It would only go so far. But, he is God. Therefore, the price that he paid for your sins is of infinite value. This is really good news, isn't it? After all, you and I can really sin, can't we? We can really make a mess of things and hurt a lot of people and then we wonder if there is any hope for us. But, you are a created being. You are finite. You are a finite sinner and Jesus is an infinite Savior. That is why we say over and over that Jesus is a bigger Savior than I am a sinner.

II. What does that mean? (2)

This is a theologically driven prayer and blessing. It is prayer for the readers to enjoy God's grace and peace. As you grow in your experiential knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, then grace and peace will be discovered, realized, valued, enjoyed more and more; exponentially more. Great truths about God (knowledge – head) are given that we might have great love (relationship – love) of God. So, this letter begins with Peter helping his readers take seriously their calling as believers to grow in Christ, to be secure in Christ and firm in doctrine. Then, they will be in a position to identify and deal with false teachers. That is part of our mission. Share the gospel and protect the flock.