

Walking the Walk by Grace to Glory

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Well, I wonder what keeps you going. Lots of people, perhaps some of us, are kept going through the week in the hope of the weekend. We live for the weekend, we sometimes say. Perhaps over the longer term, you can keep going through a really hard season in the hope of a break at the end, a getaway, a nice holiday. Or even longer than that, what kept you going, I wonder, over the last couple of really hard years? A friend of ours used to say, keep going for walks, that keeps me sane. As long as I can keep walking, I can keep going. There were times, of course, when all that we could do was walk. And for some of us walking kept us going as we hoped for a better world. Well, this morning, Peter wants to help us keep walking, keep going. We all live in hope of something, and that hope is what keeps us going. And Peter wants to keep us walking the walk in the sure and certain hope of a better world. Not only for a few weeks, a few months, a few years, but for a lifetime.

Because if we are following Jesus today, we are walking the walk by God's grace to glory, not only a better world, but a new world, a new creation. That's the destination that Peter set out for us last week, wasn't it? He told us there is a glorious inheritance being kept in heaven for us that cannot perish or spoil or fade. It's not going anywhere.

And so, if your faith is in Jesus, you are being kept for that inheritance too. But you are going somewhere, says Peter, God in his great power keeps us going until that day, until we reach glory, until the day when Jesus comes again to save and to make all things new. Peter set that crown right in our eyeline, didn't he? Don't lose sight, he said, of your invincible hope, your glorious destination, because that is what will keep you going as you take up the cross daily and follow Jesus.

And today, to keep us walking, keep us going, he gives us three more truths to help us. As you set your hope on Christ's return, he says, firstly, look where you're walking. Secondly, remember where you've come from. And thirdly, watch what you're taking in. You're walking a precious path. Remember, you have come from the cross. Watch that you're drinking in the gospel. This is how God will keep us walking this walk until the great coming day of Jesus coming again. Another good friend of ours, whenever you ask him how he's doing, his normal response is pressing on. Pressing on. Maybe that sounds a bit downbeat.

It did to me at first. Maybe it's just the way he says it. Pressing on. But I hope by the end of our service that we'll see that, in fact, pressing on is a wonderful place to be. Full of hope and full of life and love. Pressing on. Keeping going. Still walking that walk by grace to glory. Because firstly, Peter shows us that the path we walk in Christ is a precious path. Look where you're walking. A precious path. Now, remember, in this first section, Peter's focus is the Christian's identity as chosen, elect. He wants us to know that God has loved us with an everlasting love. And to get that wonderful truth into our bloodstream, he puts it this way. Okay, everything that God has ever promised and every promise that he has ever delivered has been for you. For you. And he unpacks that for us in those first few verses, verses 10 to 12, he builds up this incredible picture of our privilege as we walk the precious path of Christ. Read with me again in your Bibles from verse 10, if you would.

[4 : 54] Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to ye searched intently and with greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. And so, the prophets of the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible, left no stone unturned, says Peter, in their search to find out when and how what God had told them would come true. There they are. They've received the message of the Spirit of Christ. They're looking forward.

When will this happen? This suffering and this glory to this king that they investigated and questioned and strained their eyes. So, in awe were they of what God had told them. Because they were told by God that his rescue would come through a chosen king whose salvation would come through his suffering and then his glory. And so, naturally, they're left asking, well, who and where and when and how?

And so, folks, this question, this search should drive our reading, shouldn't it, of the Bible when we pick up our Old Testament. What's the question we need to be asking? We might have lots of questions.

I'm sure you do. I do when I read the Bible. But there's one question we can't not ask, and it's the question that the prophets themselves were asking as they wrote it. Show me Christ.

Where is Jesus here? How does this get us to him? That, says Peter, is why Isaiah wrote what he wrote. That's why Moses wrote what he wrote. That is what this whole book, the Bible, is about from beginning to end. And so, that is how we need to read it. So, search intently in your Bibles and with greatest care for Jesus. I think I've probably said something like this every Sunday so far this year, but it's so important for us, brothers and sisters, so important. You're reading the Bible and thinking that it's all about how to be a better person, or even how to be a better Christian, but forgetting Jesus would be a bit like reading Lord of the Rings and thinking it's a book about what to do with your unwanted jewelry. Okay, unwanted jewelry is gotten rid of, but we've totally missed the point of the book.

[7 : 36] We've forgotten the hero of the story, the one who himself destroys sin and death and evil forever. We need to read the Bible with Jesus in the spotlight, because that's how the prophets wrote it.

And as the prophets searched for the answers to their questions, verse 12, it was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but ye. Bon accord. In other words, ye were those promises of a coming rescue, a coming grace, a coming king for, well, whatever was promised was promised for ye.

If the prophets had succeeded in their search, says Peter, they would have found themselves peering down from the organ loft, peering in through the windows at us here in Bon Accord.

This is the time that they longed for and hoped for and searched for. Everything that the prophets wrote, everything God ever promised was for ye. Just take that in for a minute.

That if there was a dedication written in the front of your Bibles, it would say, this book is dedicated to all those who will come after the suffering of Christ when he is seated in his glory.

[9 : 05] Peter says, God wrote the Bible for ye and me. They were serving not themselves, but ye. What's more, Peter goes on, the prophets spoke of the things that have now been told ye by those who preach the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Okay, so here we go from the other direction. What did the prophets of the old covenant and the preachers of the new covenant prophesy and preach? How many things did they have to say?

Two different things? Or 50 different things? There it says, Peter, one thing. One thing. The things the prophets spoke about have been preached to you by those who preach to you the gospel. They were saying the same thing. Some before Christ, some after Christ, but all about Christ. So just picture for a minute ourselves, yourself, in the middle of that diagram, Bon Accord, okay, surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses.

How many countless millions, prophets, preachers, ordinary people have kept and passed on and shared the message of God's grace to you in Jesus so that you would believe it and so that your faith and your hope would be in God today?

To keep us walking by grace to glory. And Bon Accord, if that wasn't enough to convince us that ye have been loved by God's everlasting love, Peter adds as an afterthought, even angels long to look into these things.

[10 : 56] Did you realize when you walked into church this morning, angels watched ye with envy? Do you realize the things that ye see and hear on a Sunday are things that angels ache with longing to see and hear because they have not seen and heard of the majesty of Christ's dying love and his rising in victory as we have?

They have not looked at Christ and seen their loving and glorious king and rescuer suffer and die to save them or rise again to be their only hope in life and in death.

Brothers and sisters, do you grasp your privilege this morning? That you stand, in fact, second only to Christ in privilege among God's people.

Higher than the prophets. Higher than the angels. Higher than any saint who has lived before. For we live in the days of Christ's risen glory, following his suffering.

And in him we trust and hope. And so, says Peter, you, Christian person today, you walk a precious path through this world.

[12 : 14] You, Bon Accord, are the envy of heaven. Now, maybe you're thinking, really? Really? That's overkill, isn't it? Surely.

This definitely doesn't feel like the best time to be a believer. Probably that was a couple of hundred years ago. Or in the days of the early church, maybe.

Or perhaps in the days of Jesus himself when he was here. Surely that was a better time to be a believer. Surely they were the privileged bunch. We're on the sidelines of society.

Things aren't looking hopeful for the church. Think of Peter's readers in the first century. They're suffering as outcasts or untouchables for their faith.

You can imagine them turning to each other in church and thinking, Peter, do you really mean us? Did you really write your letter for us? Yeah, I did, he says. You suffering saints, as you follow Christ in your ordinary lives.

[13 : 17] As you face hard things for him. And tough choices for him. As you suffer the pain and the shame that comes from a world that doesn't love him.

You are not the most to be pitied, but the most privileged of all God's people ever to have lived. Friends, if an angel could burn with jealousy, he would do so at the sight of you, says Peter.

You walk a more precious path than any creature in heaven or on earth has ever walked. For you walk the path of the once suffering, now glorified King, Jesus Christ.

So as you take up the cross daily, today, tomorrow, Monday morning, as you take up that cross and follow him, as you look towards the crown that is being kept for you in heaven, you are blessed beyond belief, says Peter.

You are loved with an everlasting love. For in Christ, everything God has ever promised, every promise he has ever delivered, has been for you. That is your identity, says Peter.

[14 : 28] And so whatever this week holds, whatever this month or year or this lifetime holds, says Peter, remember you walk a precious path, the path of Christ, the King.

And Peter wants us to keep walking this precious path, following after our crucified and risen Savior. And so he teaches us next how to walk and gives us reasons to keep walking.

So secondly, then, we are to walk out of ignorance into holiness. And we do so by God's grace. Look down with me, if you would, at verse 13.

We get a key word there at the beginning. Therefore, therefore, because you walk this precious path with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed that is coming.

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

[15 : 37] For it is written, be holy, because I am holy. So, says Peter, as you walk this path, set your hope firmly on Jesus coming again, that hope that keeps us going, because the walk is going to be difficult.

Now, last week, we saw that the Christian life is followed by suffering, like a shadow that follows us along. But Peter is a pastor. Peter knows that the risk for these suffering saints is that they might begin to walk differently or to live differently so as to shake off that shadow of suffering.

They will be sorely tempted to conform to the evil desires they had when they lived in ignorance. Tempted to fall back into that old way of life.

You know it. And I know it. We've been there. Perhaps you were there this morning. How easy it is, says Peter, to drift. Drift.

Drift by degrees back into old habits, old patterns of life. To compromise our living. Just to make life that bit easier today.

[16 : 52] Perhaps to help us fit in better with people in our lives. Perhaps to avoid people thinking that being a Christian really means thinking on popular thoughts. Or behaving in radically different ways.

Or behaving in radically different ways. The pressure on us is huge. Day by day to conform. Especially, okay, if you're young. Okay, you guys studying.

The pressure is huge, isn't it? One of my old lecturers in Edinburgh, he's not a Christian. But he was recently suspended from his position. Because a student claimed that he was teaching things, saying things that went against the current sort of accepted opinion.

The social orthodoxy. And his name was dragged through the mud months before the investigation found out that actually, he hadn't said or done anything wrong.

So imagine now what it must be like to live as a Christian in there, in that setting. Some of you don't have to imagine that.

[17 : 59] I know that. Every day risks a social or an intellectual death. So do pray. Do pray for our students, won't you?

Pray for one another. It's especially tough, isn't it, when we're young, to want to be like others. But we all will face that pressure. How tempting is it in the week to compromise our witness.

To say what we know isn't true. To behave in ways that we know are unworthy of Christ. Whether that's a decision we make over days or weeks.

Or just in the split moment. The split second of panic. To choose sin rather than suffer. Or Peter would remind us this morning that if our hope is set on Christ, how we live matters.

As obedient children, he says, don't conform to the ignorance of the world. But be transformed by the renewing of your minds. By the holiness of Christ. Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy.

[19 : 04] There's a saying, isn't there, that someone can be too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use. Well, Peter flips that on his head and says, it is possible, perhaps even more tempting for us as Christians, to be so earthly minded that we are no longer of any heavenly use.

If we don't daily set our hope on Christ, says Peter, that will show up in the way we live. We'll be drawn back into the old habits, the evil desires we had before we ever knew Christ.

Incidentally, that's why Peter calls it ignorance. He's not calling them stupid. Of course he's not. He's just saying before, they didn't know Christ. They didn't know the most important thing in life.

It was an ignorant life. So why go back there now? Folks, I don't know about ye. But I know that my old evil desires still live in me.

And I'm sure I can't be the only one. And so we need, don't we, to set our eyes daily, not on the things down here, but on Christ. There's no silver bullet.

[20 : 20] There's no 12 steps to holier living. There's only a person. There's only the holy one. Only Jesus Christ himself. He is our only hope of being holy as he is holy.

Conformed not to this world, but transformed by his holiness. So Peter doesn't want us, does he? Just talking the talk, but walking the walk.

In fact, he uses a great Old Testament walk to depict our lives here. Earlier, Dougie read for us, didn't he, from Exodus chapter 12.

God told his people to tuck in their robes. Literally, gird up your loins. Pick up your long robe. Put your sandals on as you eat the Passover lamb so that you will be ready to run freely into your promised rescue.

Because their hope was set, wasn't it, on a promised land. And so verse 13, Peter literally writes, gird up the loins of your mind.

[21 : 23] He's describing that same thing. Gather up the loose bits of your mind, of your heart, he says, and walk and run freely towards that promised day.

Don't let anything in your trip you up on the way. Get stuck under your feet. Get in the way of you going towards Christ's coming. Because, he says, we've been rescued by the death of the ultimate Passover lamb.

You see that in verse 18? You know, you know that it was not with perishable things like silver or gold that you were redeemed. From the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors.

But with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defects. The Christian life is life on the road. And walking this walk isn't easy.

But remember, says Peter, where you came from. Remember, you have come from the cross. Where Jesus poured out his precious blood to save you.

[22 : 28] And if his blood, says Peter, is more precious than anything in this world. Than silver or gold. Then he is worth walking for. Worth keeping going for.

However hard it gets. Give up what you want, he says. But don't give up Christ. Because he is the precious sacrifice who saves you. So, Bon Accord.

Keep walking the walk out of ignorance into holiness, says Peter. And finally, we're to walk out of rivalry into love.

So, watch, he says, what you're taking in. Watch what you're taking in. Have a look down with me if you would at verse 22. He says, now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have a sincere love for each other.

Love one another deeply from the heart. Now, perhaps you're wondering, what's love got to do with it? You know, isn't this a solo pilgrimage?

[23 : 32] You know, head down, teeth gritted. A stoic heart. A hard, tough skin. Isn't getting to glory something I do on my own? Or maybe at most, it's me and Jesus.

Well, says Peter, we can't obey. We can't follow Jesus on our own. It's impossible. Do you see that in that verse? You've purified yourself by obeying the truth so that you have a sincere love for each other.

See, for Peter, obeying the truth means denying ourselves, taking up the cross, and following Jesus.

And Jesus didn't take up the cross stoically. He wasn't thinking of how hard it was for him, how much it would cost him. He was thinking of what we would gain by it.

But he went to the cross out of love for his people. And so, says Peter, if ye have taken up the cross and ye follow him, what will grow out of that obedience is love for his people, for each other.

[24 : 36] If we obey the truth, we have a sincere love. So, says Peter, live out that love. Live out that love. Which means, to put it really simply, brothers and sisters, we need to walk together.

We cannot obey Jesus without loving each other. Perhaps this morning you're listening here. Perhaps you're listening online. And you're not actively a part of a church.

Part of the life of a church. Well, here's an invitation to come. And to love sincerely and deeply your brothers and sisters from the heart. Come and be part of that.

Because, again, Pastor Peter knows, doesn't he, that suffering can isolate us. How easy is it to drift away? Or worse, to turn against those who perhaps aren't going through what you're going through.

Maybe don't seem to get it. Or are facing something different in life. So easy, isn't it? And our pain to break away from others. To turn against others. Well, look at those words in chapter 2, verse 1.

[25 : 47] Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander of every kind. Those sins are the very opposite of love, aren't they?

I guess the word I've chosen for that is rivalry, turning on each other. Seeing others as being on a different team, a different side. Yeah, says Peter.

Those sins existed in the churches that he's writing to. Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. And friends, we at Bon Accord are not immune from those sins today, are we?

To be clear, I'm not saying those words characterize our life here at Bon Accord. Far, far from it. Many of you do love and serve one another with a sincere and deep love from the heart.

I've been the recipient of so much love, even in the months that I've just been here. Lots of you have spoken to me also about the great sense of unity that you feel in this body of the church.

[26 : 51] It's wonderful. But if we think those sins couldn't ever be true of our church, then we don't know ourselves well enough. So one way for us to guard, then, against rivalry and grow in love for one another might be to ask, how can we deepen that love for each other day by day?

As a church, we are spread out, aren't we, across the city, across the shire. Perhaps we're not likely to bump into each other aside from on a Sunday.

But who can you encourage with a text or a call in their faith this week? Who are you committed to praying for or praying with in the week?

Who could you meet up with, perhaps, every couple of weeks, have over dinner, eat, catch up, read the Bible together? Perhaps have a think this afternoon of ways that you can keep walking this walk out of rivalry into love.

Because when suffering does come, and the walk gets steeper, and the cost goes up of following Christ, we can't keep going on our own. We need bonds of love that go beyond this building, into every part of our lives, every day of the week.

[28 : 15] How do we grow and love them? Well, says Peter, watch what you take in. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

Now you've tasted the Lord is good. Basically, he's saying continue as you started. You've been born again, he says, not of perishable seed, but imperishable through the living and enduring word of God.

And verse 25, this is the word that was preached to you. You were born again, he says, through the resurrection of Jesus as you heard and believed the good news of Jesus, the gospel.

So don't now go and feast on something else. As if something else is going to keep you going, then what started you off? Keep taking in that same gospel.

Your athletes are so careful, aren't they, about what they eat? It's all designed to give them exactly what they need to keep going, to reach the goal. So as Christians, as we walk the walk, we have a perfectly designed diet to keep us going to glory.

[29 : 22] And it is the gospel of God's grace, the good news of Jesus. Peter calls it pure spiritual milk. And we're to crave it like a newborn baby. Babies have a way of reminding you that milk isn't optional.

Lots of you know that. We know that. DJ and Hannah are soon to know it. They crave milk loudly, persistently, repeatedly. They cannot get enough.

And just when you think they've downed more than their weight in milk, they cry out for more milk. Like newborn babies, writes Peter, crave pure spiritual milk.

Friends, what first taught us to love is what is going to keep us loving. What first set us off on this walk is what is going to keep us walking.

What gave us new birth at first is what is going to keep us growing. We walk the walk by grace and grace alone to glory. And so as we walk day by day, tomorrow, the day after, the day after that, this precious path of Christ, out of ignorance into holiness, out of rivalry into love, or would we all be able to answer that question?

[30 : 43] How are you doing? With a hearty and joyful and hope-filled pressing on, keeping going, still walking the walk to glory by grace.

Let's pray together for that. Let's pray together. Let's pray together. One thing I do.

Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

And dear Father, that is our simple prayer today. Lord, for those of us who have taken up the cross and followed with our faith and our hope resting in Jesus, we pray simply, Lord, for the strength to keep going.

We thank you for Jesus, our sympathetic high priest who understands our weakness. Lord, you were tempted in every way as we are, yet you are without sin.

[31 : 53] And so we pray, our Father, in our temptations, strengthen us, we pray, by Christ's power. Keep us looking to him, our hopes set on him.

Father, we pray that you would keep transforming us by his holiness. Lord, keep us, we pray, from being conformed to this world. Lord, keep us from following our own evil desires.

Keep us following heartily after Christ. Lord, for those who are yet to put their faith in him, we pray, Father, that you would compel them and convince them, these dear friends, that he is worthy, that his blood is precious, and that it works, that his blood brings us to ye.

And so this walk is a precious one. Lord, bless us all, keep us all, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.