

02-11-20b Revelation

Let's resume our study in the book of the Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, by way of 2 Peter chapter 1. There are many ways I could spend as many lessons summarizing these seven letters as we have studying them, but you can relax, we're not going to. What I do want to point out, though, is if you step back and look at what the purpose that the Lord Jesus had in delivering these letters as the preface to the rest of the book of Revelation, it is a part of that. It could have been its own little book, like Jude or Titus or Philemon, just a two-chapter missive containing these seven letters, or each could have circulated separately, but they were put in after chapter 1, before chapters 4 through 20, for a reason.

And it does place the instruction from the Lord in historical context, and I don't mean to belittle the fact that these have a historic application, even as I say I don't really think it's valid to find specific historic periods in which one or another letter pertains, because they are all pertinent in all ages, and you have to have kind of a selective, winking, blinking sort of view of history to get them to fit. There has been persecution of the church. You know, Fox's Book of Martyrs was not written about people that lived from 100 to 300 AD.

Fox's Book of Martyrs was written about people who lived beginning in the second millennium, and there was great and widespread persecution. They have that little thing called the Inquisition. So you can't say, well, the Smyrna letter just really has its applicability 100 to 300, but it does have applicability in the church age in human history, and that's what we get here.

John on the Isle of Patmos sees the glorified Lord, much as he would have appeared, I think, on the Mount of Transfiguration, much as he would have appeared, I think, in the day when Moses got a preview of what he himself would see on the Mount of Transfiguration when he said, Lord, show me your glory. God said, I'll put you in the cleft of the rock, I'll cover you with my hand, and as my glory passes by, you can look at the after part. You can't look at it full on, but you can see as it departs.

You can see the after glory, and that's what Moses saw on the mountaintop back in Exodus 33, and that's what he saw on the Mount of Transfiguration, and that's what John sees in Revelation 1. It's the glory. We sometimes get so enmeshed in the details of our life and the circumstances that we face and the immediate goals that we want to accomplish that we lose sight of the glory. Glory is associated with God, and it is the knowledge of God that is at issue.

It is knowing God even more than learning how to love, even more than learning how to have faith and have hope. Love and faith and hope are not possible apart from knowledge of God. Faith is not genuine faith if it isn't associated with, plugged into, inextricably bound to knowledge of God.

Hope isn't a real hope. Any sad-sack, heathen unbeliever can have hope. When their home gets

wiped out, they had the tornadoes a week or so back on the eastern coast there.

Tornadoes ripped through and wiped out home after home. Invariably, it's like the applause scene at the end of all modern movies. Anytime there's a disaster, they stick a microphone in somebody's face.

Well, how do you feel? Well, I've lost everything, but we'll cope, we'll manage, we'll pull together. And people admire the resiliency of the human spirit. And a lot of these people are just pagan, atheist, hell-bound unbelievers, but they have a kind of a hope.

Every cloud has a silver lining. The dark is before the dawn and all this other trite sort of... Basically, you just have to stay alive and keep breathing, and things are bound to get better. You can't have a disaster happen to you every day.

This is hope of a different nature. This is an expectation that is based on knowledge of God. And we saw that in our first study this evening, in 2 Peter 1, the first chapter of 2 Peter.

These exceedingly great and precious promises are ours. His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him. It's a hard thing for you and me to sit here and get past the theology of it and into the practice of it.

I spend my days and my weeks and now my months editing sermons and listening to preaching. You can be lifted up and carried away by the great oratorical power of a preacher and by the wonderful things that you see in Scripture, but after 30 or 40 minutes, or sometimes 45 or 47 minutes, however long the tape is, you have to close your Bible and close your notebook and set aside your pen and stand up and go live a quote-unquote normal life. And to be able to transfer what we see in Scripture and what we hear the Spirit saying to the churches into our minute-by-minute walk through the adversarial world with our corrupt nature and our fallen condition and our fallen fellow travelers on the planet, that is the great test.

It is the easy course to only revisit our spiritual knowledge and the things of God upon occasion, upon a Sunday or upon a crisis. Things really start going south and we instinctively turn to God and the rest of the time we kind of let it lay. But Peter is saying, and the Lord Jesus Christ is saying to these seven churches, do not deceive yourself.

Don't be fooled. Don't be lulled into a false security, a false life that has no eye on consequence, that has no eye on outcome, because this life is short and these circumstances and situations are brief. Genuine hope, not just we'll get through and we'll survive, but I have a confident expectation of provision, of blessing, of service, of transformation, of glory.

I have an expectation of glory, surpassing grace, surpassing presence, surpassing knowledge of God. That comes from knowledge of God. Faith has no intrinsic merit or value.

It is the object of faith that has the merit and the value and the power. To trust God, we have to

know God. So that is the issue.

That is why there is an introduction to each of these letters. No two introductions are the same. The endings are often the same.

He that has an ear, let him hear. To him that overcomes, I'll grant some great thing. How come the introductions are all different? Because divine power is given to us, all the things that pertain to life and God.

What is there that doesn't fall into the category of life and godliness? What can you think of for a believer that isn't covered under all things pertaining to life and godliness? Well, they are given to us through the knowledge of Him who called us by His glory and virtue. Our precious faith comes through the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, He says up in the first verse. So, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature.

Peter, it's amazing. They say, well, Peter was the fisherman. He was kind of a Russian where angels fear to tread, impulsive, kind of a shallow thinking, brusque.

They always have a big man play him in the movies, kind of a burly, sort of a lovable oaf type of thing. Peter was sharp. He was one of the three that Jesus took with Him to see everything.

The mountaintop, the upper room where the young girl was raised, the Mount of Olives when He prayed in Gethsemane, and you can see the reason for it here. Look at the summary of important truth that Peter gives in these few short verses. Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.

Glory and virtue are the goal. It is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. It's what you see when you look at the author and finisher of our faith.

By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises. When you think of what's most valuable, and when you think of something that's most important, I see people in the periphery of two or three different estates that are being settled right now, and people have things. They have antiques.

They have furniture. They have vases. They have coin collections.

They have stamp collections. They have things that are considered by the world to be valuable. You say, boy, I see this and I wish I had watched more antique roadshow, so I would know what it's worth.

Because here this thing is. What do we consider great? What do we consider precious? If your house caught fire, what's the first thing? You know, they always ask you this in Sunday school.

And you know the right answer.

Oh, I'd get my Bible. If your house caught fire, what would you be willing to risk the flames to go in and get? Parents. Obviously, their children.

Most people, their pets. And then you get down to possessions. My great-grandfather's house caught fire when my grandfather was a boy because it was this time of year.

It was, well, monthly. It was in December. And the boys were trying to find their Christmas presents that were hidden in the house.

Well, back then, of course, they didn't have electric lights. They had candles. So the boys got in a closet, poking around, trying to find where the presents were hidden and set the clothing on fire and burned the house down.

Well, as the house caught fire and began to go up in smoke and all of the clothing and the pictures and the possessions and the furniture and everything that they owned was about to be devoured by the flames, my great-aunt, my grandfather's sister, they were children at the time, she had sold magazines. I could tell you this long, fascinating story, but she had entered a contest and sold the most of anybody and won, as her prize, a piano. She won a brand-spanking-new piano, a beautiful instrument that was sitting in the house.

Well, the house was burning down, and so they went in and they pulled the piano out and the brass door latch thing was sticking out and put a great long scratch in it that was there ever after as a reminder of this, but at least they had the piano. I mean, they got it out of the house. My great-granddad had bought his wife a brand-new, my great-grandmother, a brand-new stove, the old-time stove, a wood-burning stove with porcelain handles and fanciness, and they dragged the stove out the back.

But precious things, needful things, valuable things that you care about when the risk of destruction comes, you think of those. What does Peter say here? By the knowledge of God, these things that pertain to life and godliness have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises. Do we ever stop and think? Do we assign the level of preciousness and value to these promises? To him that overcomes, I will grant to sit with me on my throne, to walk with me in white, to partake of the tree of life, to be a pillar in the temple of my God with my new name written on him, and the name of the holy city, and the name of my God.

How precious are those promises? Are they just words on paper? Do they sound good when we hear them and then we go off and forget? What about on Tuesday afternoon? What about on Thursday morning? What about during the daily exigencies of life? Are they great and precious to us? Around the holidays, people make travel plans. My sister is going to be coming from a faraway place in Florida and coming back home to Oklahoma. We'll get to see her.

We don't get to see her very often. And I think about it. I anticipate it.

We anticipate the visit of loved ones. It is an expectation that we cling to and that we value. It's precious to us to have the opportunity to see our loved ones and to fellowship with those that we hold dear.

Do I count the promises of God in that same light? Do I bring them out of the storehouse of my soul and look at them like I would a precious possession, a valuable? That's what Peter says here. They are exceedingly great, exceedingly precious promises. That through these, it's valuing these promises, treating them as real and as imminent and fulfillable in my life and in your life.

It's through this that we become partakers of the divine nature. Do you know what that means? If we don't value knowledge of God, if we don't seek and ask and knock. Jesus has stood at the door and is knocking.

He told the story of the person who asks and it will be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will open.

There are all kinds of doors in God's plan. Some of them the Lord is knocking on and we're supposed to open. Some of them we are supposed to knock on and he will open.

Do we care? Do we value it? Is it a part of our daily set of priorities? Because if it's not, it's like they say, if you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time. It has to be a part of our aim. It has to be a part of our goal.

We have to care. Laurie remembers, you read the literature about the U.S. Naval Academy. I will never forget when I was reading through and contemplating because my dad said, hey, this is an option.

You get sort of a free nomination because your dad's a retired military man, a retired Marine. I had always thought, ooh, military school, that sounds like no fun. But as I started contemplating and thinking, well, maybe this is a good option, I was reading through and they have these little pictures in the margin of the catalog.

They have a picture of this midshipman Joe Gish or W.T. Doerr, whoever it was. And they have this little caption underneath and they're looking at you with kind of a sincere look and they say, you have to want it. If you want to get through this place, if you want to make something of this education, you have to want it.

You can't come casually. You can't come sort of, well, by default, or well, I couldn't think of anything else. You have to want it to seize it and lay hold of it.

You have to be motivated. You have to have a goal and a purpose that will sustain you when the going is rough, when the chips are down, when it's not fun. You have to want it.

These are exceedingly great and precious promises. Through these, you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through these faulty desires, the lusts of the flesh. You sow to the flesh, you of the flesh reap corruption.

We want to sow to the Spirit. We want to reap from the Spirit, life everlasting. So look what he says now as you go down in 2 Peter 1.5. So look, Peter says, for this very reason, and all of this language is so emphatic in Greek.

English fails to get this across. Also, for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue. We've already seen the word virtue, haven't we? He just used it above in verse 3. We've been called by glory.

We've been called by virtue. So you start with faith, but you don't just sit there and lash yourself to the mast with faith alone. Add to your faith virtue.

Add to your virtue knowledge. Add to knowledge self-control. Add to self-control perseverance.

And each of these, you could stop. We could do a whole lesson on each one of these words, but Peter doesn't have time. He's writing a short letter, maybe a limited amount of parchment here or manuscript.

So he says, look, this is the reason you need to be diligent. Paul says, be diligent to show yourself approved unto God. You know it says, study, study to show thyself approved.

It's be diligent. It's the same word here. Giving all diligence.

Add to your faith virtue. What exactly is virtue? What is it we're supposed to add to our faith here? Well, in the Greek here, it is aretane. Aretane.

And it has the idea of truth, of the ring of truth, of a sterling quality, a genuineness. Genuineness. This is the opposite of hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy, you're one thing on the inside and something else on the outside. And when we studied in Luke, Jesus talking about the light of the body is the eye, and if you have light on the inside, then your whole body is light. You're consistent.

You're the same thing inside and out. If not, there's hypocrisy. In order to not be a hypocrite, the only way you can not be hypocritical is to have aretes, to be genuine all the way through.

Well, he says, add that to your faith. How do you do that? Where is the power that provides all things for life and godliness? The knowledge of Him who called us. If we find ourselves playing false, if we find ourselves kind of saying one thing and doing another, having to sort of misrepresent when we're in conversation with people, this is the most common place where we wind up practicing hypocrisy is around each other.

How do we achieve genuineness? How do we achieve virtue? It's also in the list of noble things that we are to think upon. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. Genuineness.

Consistency. This is what the word integrity means. Structural integrity means it's all sound and solid and built the way it's supposed to be.

How do you add virtue to faith? Well, He has already told us up above. His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to godliness and to life. So I know that to add virtue to my faith I need divine power.

Where is that divine power? Through the knowledge of Him who called us. This is the word of God. How many times have we reviewed it? The power of God comes into the life of the believer through the word of God and the spirit of God.

Okay, that's a great principle, but here I am, and I'm about to have a visit with the family or I'm about to be associated with a group of believers in some fashion. We have co-op for the girls where you go down and you're around other people. We have intermingling with family and friends and the normal exigencies of life.

So I say, I've got that coming up in this day. I've got to go down to work every day and deal with believers and the flotsam and jetsam of weirdness that attends any group of people. And they're saying the same thing about me.

I've got to work with old Sam today. There's no telling what he's going to come out with. So how do we equip ourselves and add virtue to our faith? This is what the Bible says to do.

It's not an option. It doesn't say if you'd like to, you might think about it. He says add it.

Add virtue to your faith. God has given you the power through knowledge of Him. Okay, here I am.

I'm going to go down and be around believers. How am I going to be unhypocritical and be virtuous? What is the mechanism? Well, what do I think about? Remember our analogy, and I can't help it. I came out of the military and it's just the way I think.

I apologize in advance. But you've got a map of the terrain. You know what the terrain looks like for the day.

I know I'm going to be around person A and that person just knows where my goat's tied and always pulls its chain. I just seem to always wind up having attitude sins when I'm around person A. Or I've got situation B and that just gets under my skin. I dig it up like an old bone and chew on it.

I can't give it over to the Lord. I can't seem to cast my cares on Him. I just keep wrapping myself around the axle and getting twisted in knots over this and I can't let it go.

It's like trying to push a basketball under the water in the pool. It just won't stay down. Okay, I know this is coming.

What I need is that acetate overlay on my map that tells me how to navigate through these obstacles, how to avoid those minefields, how to stay within the protection of my friendly interlocking fields of fire and not go out and get sniped and get shot and get bombed and get my legs blown off like I have every other time I've gotten in this situation. What does the Bible tell me? What is my reality? Am I going to sit there and think about that person? Am I going to sit and think about that situation? Or am I going to think about God? Now we think, well, I need the specific doctrines. I need a verse that addresses this situation.

No, you don't. You do not need a verse that tells you how to deal with an obstreperous person. You do not need a verse that tells you how to be free of worry and how to stop worrying.

What we need is epinosis of God. Think about God. Think about anything pertaining to God.

God is faithful. God is the creator. Look at what God did for Joseph.

Look at how much Joseph went through. Look at the faithfulness of God. What about Abraham? Abraham went down to Gerar and fouled up.

Abraham went down to Egypt and fouled up. Look at the faithfulness of God. God promised Abraham he would make of him a great nation, and he did.

He uses Abraham as an example in Romans chapter 4 of tremendous faith. And Abraham fouled up all over the place. And God didn't give up on him, because Abraham kept returning to God in faith.

It wasn't the power of Abraham. It doesn't say Abraham assigned to himself virtue and was credited with righteousness by God. Abraham believed God.

Abraham knew God. Abraham is called the friend of God. You don't become someone's friend unless you know them.

So we think, when something goes wrong with your car, and you want to fix it, and you get the choke manual, you need the chapter and verse. If you're in the old days and had a manual choke, and you say, I've got a kink in my choke cable, where is it in the book that talks about kinked choke cables? I need to find that. We sometimes treat the Bible like that.

I've got this specific problem. I think my teenager might be doing drugs. This is one that doesn't apply to any of us.

None of us have teenagers. But people do. I think my teenager might be doing drugs.

Is there a verse in the Bible for parents that think their teenagers might be doing drugs? You don't need that. We need epinosis of God. Think about the faithfulness of God, the promises of God.

Re-familiarize yourself. Fill the picture, fill the horizon, the view in your mind with God. Everything that you can think of about God.

It cannot have anything to do with your current situation. So much the better if it doesn't, because it will take your mind off it. How well do you know the word of God? Can you call to mind the progress of Israel as they left Egypt and went through the wilderness to the promised land? Can you think of the adventures of Joshua and Caleb, the old man going up the mountain to slay the last of the Canaanites and take his land? Can you think of the life of David? Do you know what happened with Solomon? Do you know what happened with Daniel? With Jeremiah? With Ezra and Nehemiah? And Job and Esther? God reveals Himself.

The knowledge of God is present in those stories and in those examples and in those illustrations. It may have nothing to do with your teenager and what they're up to, but it's the knowledge of God and the power to be sterling in quality and genuine and add virtue to your faith is in the knowledge of God. Turn your eyes on the author and finisher of faith.

He's the one that figured it out. The Lord Jesus lived by faith. Man doesn't live by bread.

Every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. It doesn't say every applicable word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Every timely word that proceeds.

Every word. Go back to the creation story. Can you rehearse the order of creation in your mind? Go back and read it.

Pull it up. Look at God. We are reactive.

There are certain things, fluorescent substances, that get excited in the presence of electrons. A cathode ray tube is what your TV is made of. It's what your computer monitor is made of.

And the substance that's coated on the inside of that screen fluoresces when these electrons shoot through it. It responds and glows. Our soul, as a new creation in Christ, responds and glows with divine energy in the presence of the knowledge of God.

Any knowledge of God. Any electron will do. And it's a wonderful promise.

It's a wonderful thing to remember because your meditation on anything... You can literally crack your Bible open and just pick a page and start reading and say, how much do I remember from my studies? Can I think of a verse that relates to this? Get our minds on God. Set your minds on things above, not on things on the earth. Set your mind.

It doesn't mean occasionally dart your mind. Flick your mind up there like a coin and have it fall back down. It says set your mind, establish your mind on things above.

That's what Peter is talking about. Exceedingly great and precious promises. Through these, you become partakers of the divine nature.

What a great promise. What is the divine nature? It's stable. It's unmovable.

It is holy. It is full of love and compassion and patience and long-suffering and gentleness and goodness and faith and meekness and temperance. It has escaped corruption that's in the world through lust.

For this very reason, be diligent. Give all your diligence to adding faith together with virtue. Add virtue to your faith.

And then, once you've got that virtue and you're stabilized, knowledge. Don't decide that you've got all the knowledge you need now and don't ever add to it. Add some more knowledge.

Get this to be a cycle, a perpetuating system in your thinking and to your knowledge, self-control. Many people get to this stage and don't look to self-control. You see this in the letters.

You remember the doctrine of Balaam and the error of Jezebel. No self-control in the area of promiscuity. Add to your self-control perseverance, upomone, endurance.

Don't fall away. Don't lose your first love. Continue to do the first works.

And to perseverance, godliness. You'll notice he's mentioned both virtue and godliness up in our previous context. We have everything we need pertaining to life and godliness.

So, add it in. It's one thing to know it and another to do it. And then to godliness, add brotherly kindness.

And to brotherly kindness, love. And that is the fulfillment of the great commandments. To love the Lord and to love one another.

For if these things are yours and abound, look at what he says in verse 8. If these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know what that means? It is possible to have the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and be barren and unfruitful. You have to add.

It has to be the basis and the means of pursuing and latching onto these other things. He who lacks these things is short-sighted. Why? Of all the things you could say about somebody who lacks these things, why would you say they're short-sighted? Not looking at the promises to the overcomer, the great and precious promises, the status of things in the kingdom and beyond.

Short-sighted even to blindness. You do not know that you are blind. People don't realize that they need glasses a lot of times when they're near-sighted because they can't see far away, but they don't know they can't see far away.

My mother, before she got glasses, she has often told this story. She had no idea there were telephone poles by the side of roads that she used to drive up and down every day. Then when she finally figured out she needed glasses and got them, there was a whole landscape that she wasn't even aware of because she had never seen that far.

Well, we can get short-sighted and we're not even aware of the reality that is just beyond the edge of our view. He says don't be short-sighted. Get these things in your soul.

Short-sighted even to blindness and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Sanctification is the basis for this. We don't receive the ministry of the Spirit.

We can't receive the inculcated word without claiming that forgiveness and cleansing and clearing the decks for it. Therefore, brethren, he says in verse 10, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure. Now, our friends in the Calvinist Reformed Theology camp would say there's a lot of waffling around on this verse because, of course, if God calls and if God elects, it is sure in their view.

Election is an act of God that took place in eternity past and if you are elect, it's a sure thing. It's as sure as God himself. But Peter says, be diligent to make your call and election sure.

This is the same kind of language we found in Romans 8.28. All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose. We have a say in our calling. We decide if the call is issued and you don't respond, you're really not called.

You know, you whistle out the back door for the dog to come up and get his chow. If you whistle and whistle and he doesn't come up, that dog was not called. I mean, you called him, but he's not a called dog because he didn't respond.

A called dog will respond to the call and say, well, I called my dog and here he is. God has issued a call, but if we don't respond, we are not the called in that sense. So be diligent, Peter says, to make your calling and your election sure, to make it certain, to fulfill it, to have it come to its end, to receive its finish.

For if you do these things, you will never stumble. What a promise. If you do these things, you will never stumble.

And an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly where? Into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If you do these things, it doesn't say if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, because not all believers are overcomers. But if you do these things, an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly.

You're not just going to be sneaking in when nobody's looking. You're not just going to be walking in at the tail end of the crowd. It is an abundant entrance.

It is a glorious entrance. It is a virtuous entrance. It is an entrance of which the Lord himself is proud.

Paul said, you believers who listen to this preaching and heed it, you're my crown. You're my glory. I'm so proud of you, he says.

You are our glory. You are our crown. Why? Because his mission is fulfilled.

He preached not in vain. He fought not as beating the air. He landed the punches he needed to land, and people responded, and they received an abundant entrance into the kingdom.

This is no small potatoes. These letters that the Lord Jesus addressed to you and to me are not just kind of a warm-up for the scorpions and the seals and the trumpets and things in Revelation. It is the foundation.

Without these preceding, there is no sense to be made of the rest of the Revelation because the rest of the Revelation is addressed to the church just as much as those chapters 2 and 3. You say, well, wait a minute. We go up in the rapture, 4-1, come up here, and then all of this Antichrist, Mark of the Beast, third of the earth, scorched, etc. The moon turns to blood and all.

We won't be here. Do I really need to study that? Yes, we very much do. The study of what happens in the last seven years of the age of Israel is no less important than studying the first 1400 years of the age of Israel that is recorded in the Old Testament and the couple of thousand years before that of the patriarchs.

But you have the history of Israel and we are diligent to study the Old Testament, aren't we? We have gone through all 50 chapters of Genesis, verse by verse. We are fixing to start Exodus. We have done Ecclesiastes.

We have done the life of David, 1 and 2 Samuel. We study the Old Testament because all these things were written for our instruction. Upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

The culmination of the ages is upon us. Well, guess what? All of that part of the Old Testament age is in the Old Testament and the rest of the Old Testament age is in Revelation 4-20. And we have just as much of an obligation to understand it and figure it out as we do the Old Testament.

I wasn't there in Moses' day, but I study it. I'm not going to be there for the 70th week, but we need to study it. One of these days, maybe we will.

But to conclude and summarize our study of these letters, the Lord Jesus Christ calls us. He

addresses us. From the standpoint of His glory, He is standing there with the eyes of flaming fire and the feet of burnished bronze.

He is walking among the lampstands. He is the faithful and true witness. He is the wonderful counselor.

He is the one who has the sharp sword. He is the first and the last. He humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant and became the last.

He is the protos, the head of all things. He is the arche, the beginning of all creation. So many beautiful, transcendent truths about Christ are just in the introductions to each of these letters.

Why do we have those introductions? Knowledge of Him is what lets us add virtue to our faith. It's what equips us with everything we need for life and godliness. It is what will give us the abundant entrance into the kingdom and the fulfillment of all of those overcomer promises.

It's all there for us to seize and lay hold of. But we can't expect it to pop out of our Bible on Sunday. We have to be thinking and not be blind.

And you'll notice that Peter, again in verse 4, the last part of it there, if you escape the corruption that is in the world through lust and are not blinded. Verse 9 is what I'm looking for. He who lacks these things is short-sighted even to blindness.

And that's the great tragedy in Laodicea. They thought they had everything and they didn't know that they're poor and miserable and wretched and naked and blind. If they weren't blind, they would see all of those other conditions, wouldn't they? It's their blindness.

Jesus told the Pharisees, if you acknowledge your problem, you would have no sin. If you were blind, you would have no sin. But because you say we see, your sin remains.

They were blind and said they saw instead of saying, I am blind, please give me my sight like so many did. Well, that is our exhortation. That's our encouragement.

And if there's a single thing that we remember after our detailed study of these letters, it is that these letters are addressed. It's just as though they had our name on the front. You can say instead of to the angel of the church, say to your first name, your last name, from the Lord Jesus Christ in all of these different aspects of his glory.

You do some things well, I have a few things against you. Change your mind, tighten up, look toward the goal. There is no one more anxious to supply us an abundant entrance into the kingdom than the Lord Jesus Christ himself and God the Father.

Everything we need has been abundantly supplied to us. Everything we need for life and godliness, we just have to reach out, lay hold of it. We have to immerse ourselves, baptize

ourselves in the name of the Father, in the knowledge of the Father, in the name and the knowledge of the Son, the name and the knowledge of the Holy Spirit.

That's what real baptism in the church age is. It is knowledge, epinosis of God that in the hands of the Holy Spirit will transform us from glory to glory. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank you for your grace. We deserve nothing but condemnation and yet you have not only rescued us from our lost and hopeless condition, but you have in Christ raised us up and given us the potential for incalculably wonderful things. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our heart, will remind us and bring to our remembrance the truths about you, the truths about the Lord Jesus Christ that we have seen in your word, that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.