

## 1 PETER 1.13-2.3

The other evening I was watching a video of my grandson eating ice cream. Clearly he hadn't had it very often. As a spoonful was placed in his mouth his little face screwed up as if in great distaste. However, then his mouth opened and his little arms flapped as a way of letting his mother know that he wanted some more. It was great fun to watch.

Caleb was leaving his mother in no doubt as to the fact that he wanted his food and we know very well that that is what children do. From the earliest days right through they let you know when they are hungry. The new born baby will scream to let its mother know that it wants feeding and the wise parent seeks to provide them with the right food so that they will grow up fit and healthy.

At the heart of our passage for this morning Peter uses this desire of a baby for food to encourage his readers in their spiritual growth. So in 1 Peter 2:2 we read, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation".

It is an image we are all familiar with isn't it – a baby craving for milk, it's head moving about searching out it's mother's breast.

Peter took this wonderful image of a new born child doing what comes naturally to enable it to grow and applied it to the church as an example of Christian life. I want for a few moments to unpack that for us.

Peter was writing to Christians spread across a wide area of what we would call modern day Turkey. These were adults who would read this letter or have it read to them and yet he likened them to babies. Now we might tease children by calling them babies. But to refer to you lot here as babies well you wouldn't perhaps be too pleased. What's the connection between these adult readers and babies...? Well both are new born. Peter here says like new born babies. He saw the Christian readers as new born not physically but spiritually. Peter had already spoken of that in his letter when in 1 Pet 1.3 he wrote, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".

They had been born as children of God. That is how it is whether it be a sudden coming to faith or a gradual one it is the same the we come to faith we are born as children of God by the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit.

I remember one Remembrance Sunday I had been saying something similar and afterwards a member of the British Legion came up to me puzzled saying surely she had always been a Christian. I had to say no.

I am like these readers and like many Christians today I can remember coming to faith being born a new, I can remember a day on which I became a Christian just as you parents can remember a day on which your child or children were born. On that day as it were I came alive to God.

Now we may ask what does that mean? Just as the life of the baby is created by the meeting of sperm and egg so the life of the Christian is created through the action of the spirit of God in the heart of the individual. God's spirit at work in my life made me:

1 aware of my sin...

2. aware I was cut off from God...

3. open to God's offer of forgiveness and renewal in Jesus Christ as we see in 1 Peter 1:18, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers."

Now what happened to me is clearly what has happened to these readers. Some of these readers had a Jewish background, some were steeped in various other kinds of religions or none but all had heard the gospel message of God's love in Jesus Christ and the need to repent and the Holy Spirit had taken that message into their hearts causing them to respond in faith taking God at his word. They had been born a new, made alive to God and that had happened fairly recently.

That raises a question for each of us. Have we come alive to God? Are we born again? Are we alive to God or are we dead to him by which I mean insensitive to Him and all he can be to us and asks of us?

So they were like babies because they had been recently born. The other way that Peter saw them as like babies is that they needed to grow up. And here Peter saw two things that would help them grow as Christians.

### **The first is a negative v1.**

Let's use the baby picture to help us understand this. God wanted these people to grow in a relationship with him. God the Father wanted them to be his children. Now we who have had the privilege of being parents know that there are things our children do which spoil that relationship. Disobedience, beating up their brothers or sisters and so on. These things damage their relationship with us. Sometimes as parents we feel the need to punish a child and that may mean the child being banished to their bedroom. That means a definite break in the relationship. God was saying to these readers and to us that our wrong doing spoils our relationship with him. So if we want to grow a good and deep relationship with God the Father we need actively to work against the things we know to be wrong in our lives and the list here is not complete. We can't simply look at this list and say I'm all right because I don't do these things. Then, as these spoil our relationship with God, they also spoil our relationship with others. In fact we could say that mostly they are about relationships with other people. Peter here was writing to a church and so saying if they want to grow as a church, if they want to grow as a fellowship that builds people up in Christ Jesus and shares his love with others then they needed to get rid of things that cause problems in the church between people.

**Malice** – might be understood as ill-will, having a negative and bad attitude towards others.

**deceit** – not dealing openly with each other

**hypocrisy** - the outward show hiding the inner reality, being insincere

**envy** - which so often creates disharmony

**slander** - evil speaking running people down, usually behind their backs.

We can see how these things would spoil relationships in a Christian fellowship.

God's call to those who would grow as his children is to get rid of the things that spoil our relationship with him and with others. Just take a moment to

reflect on that list and see where these things enter your life and realise that to grow as a child of God they need to be removed. However, there is also

### **The positive means of growing v2.**

Again it is the baby picture. God through Peter says just as a baby craves with its whole being milk to enable it to live and grow so if we wish to grow as God's children we should crave pure spiritual milk. But what did Peter mean by that? Well the word for spiritual in the Greek that Peter used is the word *logikon* based upon *logos* the word. Peter is saying to grow they need the word of God. Just as a baby thrives on the milk of its mother so the Christian thrives on the word of God. It is as we take in the word of God and allow that word through the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts and guide our lives that we grow as God's children. If we wish to grow as God's children we should crave, deeply desire the word of God. I wonder if we do? Do we really look forward to reading our Bibles on our own or with others?

I wonder how often the Bible remains unopened on our shelves or tables? I wonder how we use any excuse to miss going to homegroup meetings or any excuse not even to be in a home group? How often do we miss Sunday service when the word is opened to us? When a baby gets a sniff of milk it starts to search for the breast but so often when we Christians get a sniff of the pure spiritual milk we turn up our noses.

God wants us to be alive to him and grow in our relationship with him but how are we to do that? How are we to grow both in terms of getting rid of things and in terms of craving the word of God?

Let's use a baby picture again. A week or so back while talking to a couple they were feeding their little boy with carrot and swede and then banana. The mother said that he'd started having solids at 12 weeks because, while it should have been 16 weeks, he was hungry and when she tried it he seemed to take it. Now I thought swede was not something I would personally like and given a plate of swede and carrot might opt to fast that day but the mother assured me he liked stronger tastes and not the bland tastes of baby rice. This gives us some pointers as to how we grow:

#### **1. personal reflection.**

The parents saw where he was at needing to swap just the milk for some solids. If we are to grow as God's children or to use another metaphor if we are to move forwards in our Christian pilgrimage then it will be necessary to spend a little time of personal reflection thinking about where we are at. Time spent looking at my life and seeing where are the areas I'd like to move forward in and what I need to help me move forward and I hope it tastes better than swede. For some of us we might say I'd like to move forward in my prayer life. Others might say I'm not listening to God through his word as I might. Yet others might say there are things God has said to me through his word that I'm not putting into practice in my life. To move forwards needs a realization of where we are at.

#### **2. personal goals**

Every parent has the goal of seeing their children grow up fit and healthy. God wants us to grow as healthy children of his. So, on the basis of where we are at, we might want to say to ourselves that over the next year I'd like to move forward in this area of prayer, Bible reading, applying the Bible or whatever and set ourselves a goal.

#### **3. growth opportunities**

We need to ensure there are feeding times if you like. The obvious ones are Sundays and homegroups but also when we run courses, through the many excellent books out on the bookstall, and if you are computer literate this sermon and others are to be found on the website and I can give you websites to look at.

In other words we need to have a Kairos moment where we observe where we are at, reflect upon it, discuss it with others plan how we can move forward in our Christian life find someone who will hold us accountable and act on it.

In part this is what the one to one sessions I have been having with people have been aimed at.

#### **4. corporate encouragement.**

I went to Kettering yesterday and we had a pretty good crowd trying to cheer our team on. It is easier when there are large groups to do that. However I have found that often it is when we are away and the Kettering supporters are in a minority that we make more noise. I find then that I immediately go to the group of Kettering supporters and stand with them to identify and together to encourage the team.

Similarly the church is important in helping us grow as God's children for as we meet together we find that encouragement. We are a bit like the away team because we live in a world that increasingly is hostile to the Christian faith and we need to come together to identify with each other and find that support and encouragement to continue in the path of Christ.

God wants us as his children all of us. But as his children he wants us to grow up in our salvation that is in the life that God has given us and so enjoy all the blessings God has given to us. Like new born babies crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. May it be that as we continue we have that great desire for the word of God which will grow our salvation until that day when we are taken home to be with our heavenly Father.