“HIS VERY GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES”

2 Peter 1:1–21

Key Verse: 1:4

“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

Do you ever despair? Some say despair has no place in Christian life. But when things seem hopeless, it’s easy to despair and give up. We easily despair about our situation, when nothing ever seems to change. We easily despair about ourselves, when we never seem to change, either. The Danish Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard described self-despair in various ways in his famous book about despair, *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849)*.* Despair is serious because it leads us to forget about our past, ignore our future and quit struggling. Despair causes us to just give in to our desires and to all the pressures around us. In the opening of 2 Peter the author encourages Christians to fight against despair. How? By holding on to God’s “very great and precious promises.” What are they? Why should we believe them? How can they help us? May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his word today.

Look at verses 1,2. Here Peter introduces himself as a servant and apostle of Jesus. He’s proud of it. Peter is writing to those, he says, who “have received” faith. He means their faith came from God, through his righteousness, not theirs. He means God gave them faith only by his grace. Peter also says their faith is “as precious as ours,” meaning that even though they started believing later, they were no less than the first followers of Jesus. Finally Peter blesses them: “Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (2). Grace and peace in abundance sounds really good. But as we know, this world is full of trouble. Living in this world doesn’t give us much grace or peace. But when we repent and believe the gospel, we come to know God, and Jesus our Lord. Peter repeats this word “knowledge” in verses 3,5,6 and 8. It’s not knowing “about” God, but knowing God in a very personal way. Even though life may be hard, through our personal knowledge of God, and of Jesus, we have grace and peace in abundance in our souls.

Look at verse 3. What seems to stand out most here is Peter’s emphasis that God wants us who believe in Jesus to live “a godly life.” He mentions godliness or godly again in verses 6,7 and in 3:11. It’s Peter’s main point in this letter, to encourage all Christians to live a godly life. What is a godly life? Simply, “godly” means “like God.” God is holy, just, merciful and faithful, and he wants us to be holy, just, merciful and faithful like him. Only as we really get to know him personally can we become like him. Godliness is rooted in a deep personal love relationship with God. “Godly” describes both one’s character and one’s behavior. Practically, to live a godly life means each day we seek God’s will for us, not just follow our own, and we strive to live up to God’s standards for us. But it’s so hard to live a godly life. Why? Because even though we believe in Jesus, we’re weak; we’re sinful; and, the world around us is so full of ungodliness.

But Peter says here that God “has given us everything we need for a godly life.” How did God give us everything we need for a godly life? He says, “Through his divine power.” It means God channels his divine power to us. But when does God do that? Verse 3b says, “…through our knowledge of him.” God endows us with his divine power through our knowledge of him. That’s so cool! Peter also gets specific about this knowledge. He says, “…our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” Basically he’s saying we know God’s grace. We know God called us not because we were good, but because it reveals his own glory and goodness. When we know God’s grace, God’s power comes to us and helps us, even though we’re so weak, to live a godly life pleasing to God.

Peter goes on to describe in another way how we can live a godly life. Read verse 4. Just as in verse 3, Peter says again that God “has given us” something. What is it? First of all, he begins with the words, “Through these,” referring to God’s own glory and goodness he just mentioned. God doesn’t *have* to promise us anything; we don’t deserve his promises due to our sinfulness. But through his own glory and goodness God has given us “his very great and precious promises.” What are they? The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is full of God’s promises. God promises to be with us always, to bless us and our descendants, and to make us a blessing, when we learn to obey him by faith. God promises to forgive all our sins in Jesus and give us the Holy Spirit if only we ask him. And these are just a few.

But we see some of God’s promises right here in 2 Peter 1. Verses 10 and 11 promise us that we will never stumble and will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus. Verse 19 promises that when we pay careful attention to God’s word, the day will “dawn” and the morning star will rise in our hearts. In chapter 3 Peter mentions many scoffers who don’t believe the day of the Lord will ever come, but Peter reminds us of God’s sure promise of it. He says in 3:13: “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.” God’s promise of his judgment and of his kingdom are very great and precious promises that help us wake up spiritually, look forward to the day of God, and really live holy and godly lives (3:11,12a).

Look at verse 4 again. Peter emphasizes here that God’s promises are “very great and precious.” Why does he say this? It suggests how bleak life is without them. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, sin and death entered the world and spread like a contagious disease. This world came under curse, and people became so sinful that God punished the world with a flood. Afterward, sin still was not rooted out of human hearts. But God made a promise never again to destroy the world with a flood, and he put a rainbow in the sky as a sign of his promise. Without God’s promises this world would have to be destroyed. But God has made promises, and they are a sign that God has not lost hope. God’s hope is to save us from our sins, even though it seems impossible. With this hope God gives us his very great and precious promises. The darker and more hopeless life becomes, the brighter and more hopeful God’s promises become.

God sent the descendants of Abraham into slavery in Egypt, to form them into a great nation. They groaned in their slavery and cried out (Ex2:23). Exodus 2:24,25 reads, “God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.” God’s covenant was based on his promises to the patriarchs, and because of his promises to them, he was ready to help their descendants. Much time had passed, and the situation had gotten so dark. It seemed God had forgotten his promises. But God did not forget. Psalm 105:8 says, “He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations.” God’s promises are so very great and precious because they reflect his character—God who seeks to save, God who’s faithful no matter what.

We human beings have our own notions about what is great or precious. We tend to value rare material things like gems or precious metals or relics from the ancient past. We treasure people or relationships or life itself as precious. And they are. But God’s promises are even greater and more precious. Peter encourages us with these words not to skim over superficially or neglect them, but to really treasure God’s promises to us as the greatest, most precious things we have. His promises give us the reason to live. His promises give us hope when there is no hope. The cold realities of our sin and of this cursed world can make us fall into deep despair, and then we start living recklessly, just pursuing pleasure in the moment. But God’s very great and precious promises cure our disease of despair and give us a real reason to strive for better things.

Read verse 4 again. Peter says that through holding onto God’s promises we “participate in the divine nature.” In Greek the word “participate” is koinonia, which means “fellowship” or “sharing.” Who are we? We’re nothing but incorrigible sinners. But through God’s promises we come to share in God’s own character—especially his great love for people lost in sin. It’s none other than his amazing grace! We change from selfish, self-absorbed, ugly people into beautiful people who care about the things God cares about. We learn God’s heart for the world he loves so much. Through his promises God enables us to escape the corruption in the world. The verse says the corruption in this world is caused by evil desires. This corruption can infect us, make us spiritually sick and lose our faith. But God’s promises give us hope for ourselves to escape it. The only real way to escape is to hold onto God’s promise to us through the blood of Jesus. Romans 3:25a says, “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.” God promises us that the blood of Jesus cleanses our consciences (Heb9:14) and purifies us from all sin (1Jn1:7). We need to hold onto these very great and precious promises God gives us in his shed blood.

How does this fundamental faith in Jesus change us? Read verses 5–7. God’s promises give us the reason to struggle and grow spiritually. It’s a long, hard struggle to grow in these ways, but there’s hope because of God’s promises to us in Jesus. We shouldn’t give up, but make every effort. To emphasize the need for this struggle for spiritual growth, Peter gives us a warning. Read verses 8,9. There’s always been a danger for Christians who claim to know Jesus to have no real change in their lives. Faith without a struggle can leave any of us ineffective and unproductive, and even nearsighted and blind. Peter then comes to a conclusion. Read verses 10,11. Notice he again says, “Make every effort.” We confirm our calling and election as we struggle to grow in godliness. And Peter reminds us here of the greatest, most precious promise we have—to one day experience a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus. What an amazing hope! May God help us hold onto his promises and really struggle to grow in his godly character.

In the last part of this passage Peter shares his personal situation and reminds us of how reliable God’s promises are. Peter knows he’s about to depart, to put aside the tent of his body, to go to be with Jesus after martyrdom. People won’t be able to rely on their human shepherd Peter anymore. But they have something even more reliable and permanent. It’s Peter’s testimony about Jesus preserved in the Bible. Specifically, it’s his testimony about the glory of Jesus when he was transfigured, which was only a preview of his glorious second coming someday. Also, we have the prophetic message in Scripture—in the Bible. It is completely reliable because it’s not man-made, but inspired by God through the Holy Spirit. We can so easily get focused on the wrong things. So Peter urges us to focus on the right thing. Read verse 19. As we really pay attention to God’s word in the Bible, he promises a remarkable thing will happen to us. The day will dawn and the morning star will rise in our hearts. The morning star gives us hope after a long, dark night, and it also resets our direction. It’s a metaphor for growing in a most beautiful, personal relationship with Jesus. There’s no other way to grow in this relationship except when we really pay attention to God’s words in the Bible.

Read verse 4 once more. May God inspire us newly with his very great and precious promises, so that we can grow in our relationship with Jesus and as spiritually effective, productive, godly servants who will not be influenced by the world, but be influencers, wherever we go.