



Central Peninsula Church

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2 Peter 1:3-4
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Precious and Magnificent Promises

SERIES: *His Precious and Magnificent Promises*

One of the great books of all time is John Bunyan's, *Pilgrim's Progress*. It's an allegory about a Christian's journey to the Celestial City. The main character is named, appropriately, Christian. Christian has many problems and struggles along the way, but he also has many good friends to help him. One of his friends was Hopeful, and one day he and Hopeful found themselves sleeping on the grounds of a castle, called Doubting Castle. The owner of the castle was the Giant Despair (the names are one of the best things about this book!). His wife was named Diffidence. What a great name – Diffidence! Despair is married to Diffidence! What a fun couple! When the giant found them on his property he forced them to get up and go with them into Doubting Castle, and he threw them into a dungeon where there was not one "bit of bread, or drop of drink, or light." When the Giant Despair asked his wife what to do with them she told him to beat them without mercy, which he went and did. For four days Christian and Hopeful spent their time in nothing but "sighs and bitter lamentations." Finally, when it seemed all hope was lost, Christian had a brainstorm. Listen to how Bunyan describes this (from the old English): "Now, a little before it was day, good Christian, as one half amazed, brake out into this passionate speech: 'What a fool...am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk in liberty! I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will...open any lock in Doubting Castle.' Then said Hopeful, 'That's good news, good brother, pluck it out of thy bosom, and try.' Then Christian pulled it out of his bosom, and began to try at the dungeon door, whose bolt, as he turned the key, gave back, and the door flew open with ease, and Christian and Hopeful both came out."

Bunyan, who wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* while he himself was in a real prison, made his point. If you want to be free from doubt and despair and diffidence, then you have to pull a key called "promise" out of your bosom. It's something every Christian has, but so often we fail to use it. Why that is?

We're skeptical about promises today. Modern politics, for example, has cast a shadow making promises, much less counting on them. Everyone knows it's easier to make a promise than it is to keep it. But when it comes to the promises

of God, should cynicism still rule the day? And what is it that God actually promises? Maybe part of the problem is we're sometimes told he's made promises he in fact has never made. If he promised health, why did the apostles die? If he promised wealth, why was Jesus poor? If he promised a stress free life, why was Paul always in trouble?

This morning I'm starting a series on this very subject of the promises of God. Most of our time will be spent in the eighth chapter of the book of Romans, but this morning I want us to look at what Peter has to say about this subject in 2 Peter 1:4. Peter tells us three reasons we can't afford to ignore the promises of God. **"For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."**

I. His promises flow out of his person.

Peter starts this statement by pointing to something he said earlier. He says, "For by these..." He's telling us how we got these promises in the first place; where they come from. The answer is up in vv. 2-3. **"Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence."** He says God in Christ has granted to us "everything pertaining to life and godliness." All of this comes through "the true knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence." And then he says in v. 4, **"For by these he has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises..."** By what? By his own "glory and excellence." God's promises have come to us because of the glory and excellence found in the person of Jesus Christ and all he's done for us.

His glory is his majestic presence. We know that God is glorious. Isaiah described him as seated on a throne, lofty and exalted, with angelic beings crying out, **"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory"** (Is. 6:1). Most of us understand that. But did you know

that Jesus Christ, as he walked right here on earth, was the manifestation of that glory. John writes, **“We saw his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth”** (Jn. 1:14). Peter knew all about this. Soon after Peter met Jesus, he was out fishing, and Jesus told him to cast his net on the other side of the boat. Peter reluctantly did as Jesus said, and after he pulled in more fish than he ever could have imagined, he fell on his face and cried out, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Peter’s pride was shattered by the glory of Christ. Later, Jesus took Peter up on a mountain where he was transfigured. His face shone like the sun and his clothing became white as light. Peter says they were **“eyewitnesses of his majesty”** (1 Pt. 1:16). These great and magnificent promises flow out of his glory.

They also flow out of his excellence. His excellence is his moral goodness. Peter knew all about that too. Years after Jesus ascended, as Peter reflected on the life of Christ, he said, **“He committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth”** (1 Pt. 2:22). That’s an amazing statement. He spent three years with Jesus. He saw him when he was in public and when he was alone. He saw him when he on and when he was off. But he could still say, “I never saw him make one wrong move or say one questionable thing.” That’s his goodness. Of course, it was goodness and glory which was supremely manifest in the cross and resurrection as well. In this act of redemption his love and grace and power and moral perfection are all brought together. Without the cross and resurrection, the promises of God could have never been made.

The first reason we can’t afford to ignore his promises is that if you do you will be ignoring him. His promises flow out of his person. You can’t separate the two. The reason we can be certain about the promises is that they flow out of his character. People argue today about whether or not character counts in the White House, but how could it NOT count? Promises are the currency of politics. How can you trust a man to keep his promises if you question his character? The more you get to know Jesus, the more you see his glory and excellence, and the more you trust him to fulfill every promise he’s made. This is the problem with so many of us who struggle with insecurity and a lack of confidence in our walk with Christ. We really must not know him that well. We know about him, like we know about Abraham Lincoln or Barry Bonds. But do

we know him as one who is personally involved with him? Do we know him as one who knows us? Do we know him like Peter did?

II. His promises are precious and magnificent.

The second reason we can’t afford to ignore the promise of God has to do with their quality and number. Peter calls them “his precious and magnificent promises.” There are few things in the Bible, besides God, that are called precious and magnificent. The word precious deals with their value. Magnificent has to do with their importance.

Maybe you have heard the story of Robert Cunningham who had dinner one night at his favorite restaurant, Sal’s Pizzeria. His waitress was Phyllis Penza, who had worked at Sal’s for 19 years. After eating, Cunningham made a good natured offer to Penza. He said she could either have a tip or split his winnings if his number was drawn in the upcoming New York state lotto. She took a chance on the lotto and she and Penza chose the numbers together. The next night Cunningham won the jackpot of 6 million dollars. That’s what you might call a “precious and magnificent promise!” The next day he gave Phyllis her tip of 3 million dollars.

What do you consider to be precious and magnificent? A 3 million dollar tip? A new baby? A long awaited promotion? A trip to Europe? God’s promises are precious and magnificent beyond any of these things. Notice that part of their value and importance is that there is more than one. He speaks of promises in the plural. What are these promises of God? Do you know them? Does God promise you a successful career? A happy marriage? A healthy body? Children that walk with the Lord and bring you nothing but joy? As much as we may want these things, they aren’t on the list of his precious and great promises. The fact is, God’s promises are more precious and more magnificent than any of these things. We have the promise of his grace and mercy. We have the promise of his continued presence. We have the promise of being conformed to the image of his Son. We have the promise that in his perfect plan all things, even the hardest things, somehow work together for good. We have the promise of answered prayer. We have the promise that our needs will be met. We have the promise of eternal life. I could go on and on.

Recently I went through a time when I really wanted something for one of my children. It was something that really got a hold of my heart and wouldn’t let go. I was overwhelmed with anxiety over this thing. Then the Lord gave me a promise from Ps. 84:11: **“The Lord God is a strength and a shield. He gives grace and glory. No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”** That promise became an anchor for my

swirling emotions. I could trust that if what I wanted for my child was truly a “good thing,” then God would grant it. That allowed me to experience joy.

Donald Barnhouse tells the story of a young woman he led to Christ while he lived in France. This girl later became the wife of a French pastor. She often came to his home and saw him and his wife taking verses from a “promise box” – a small box that held approximately 200 promises from the Bible printed on heavy paper curled into cylinders. They used to take one out and read it when they needed a word of comfort. This girl made a promise box by hand, writing these same promises in French. Throughout the years this box was used in her home by her children, and they were taught to trust in the Lord. During the war they experienced some rough times. No food was available except messes of potato peelings from a restaurant. Her children were emaciated; they cried to her for food. Their clothing was almost in rags, and their shoes were worn through. In a tragic moment she turned to the promise box in desperation. She prayed, “Lord, I have such great need. Is there a promise here that is really for me? Show me, O Lord, what promise I can have in this time of trial.” She was blinded by tears, and in reaching for the box, she knocked it over. The promises showered down around her, on her lap, on the floor; not one was left in the box. She was filled with joy as the Lord used that to show her that all of the promises were indeed for her in the very hour of her greatest need.

If the Holy Spirit were to allow us to somehow see all of the promises of God at one time showered down upon us, I don't think we would be able to contain our joy, regardless of our situation. They're that precious and that magnificent.

III. His promises are necessary for growth.

But that's not all. The third reason we cannot afford to ignore the promises of God is that without them we can't really grow in Christ. That's what Peter means when he says, “so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” That's quite a statement! Somehow the promises of God allow us to escape corruption and become more like God. Did you know that's what God intends for us? He wants us to escape something and he wants us to partake of something. We escape corruption that is the result of a life dominated by lustful desires. This is not just talking about sexual desire; it could be a desire for money or comfort or power or pleasure or intimacy or control or food or drink or anything that takes over your life. These things fool us. They convince us that this is what we really need, but soon we find out

that we're being destroyed and corrupted. That which offered life brings death. God wants us to escape that. He wants us to partake of his nature. Of course, we can never become all-powerful and all-knowing like he is, but we can become holy and just and loving and pure like he is. We know that one of his promises is that eventually that will happen. Phil 1:6 says that **“he who began a good work in you will perfect it in the day of Jesus Christ.”** I John 3:2 says, **“We know that when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is.”** But in the meantime, we can grow. We can become more like him. And the promises help us do that.

Some people think we grow in Christ by realizing our debt. You've heard this: “God has given so much to you; he has done so much for you; now what will you do for him? How much will you give to him.” This is called the “debtor's ethic.” Parents use this all the time: “Look how much I have sacrificed for you, and this is how you pay me back?” The motivation here is guilt.

Other people think we grow in Christ by threats. The idea here is that if you don't get with it and obey Christ then sooner or later he will disown you or at least punish you. So we end up obeying God out of fear.

But here Peter tells us we don't grow by guilt or by fear, but by the promises of God. How does that work? How do his promises function in our life to allow us to escape lust and partake of God's nature? Maybe one example will help. In the Fall of 1982, Leadership magazine carried an anonymous article by a pastor who confessed to years of bondage to pornography. He tells a story of how he was finally freed from this. He ran across a book by a Catholic writer called, *What I Believe*. In the book Mauriac admitted to his own battles with lust and said that guilt or fear had not freed him. He said the verse that freed him was a promise from the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” He realized that it was the promise of seeing God that would free him. The pastor who read this wrote, “The thought hit me like a bell rung in the dark, silent hall. So far, none of the scary, negative arguments against lust had succeeded in keeping me from it...But here was a description of what I was missing by continuing to harbor lust: I was limiting my own intimacy with God. The love he offers is so transcendent and possessing that it requires our faculties to be purified and cleansed before we can possibly contain it. Could he substitute another thirst and another hunger for the one I had

never filled? Would Living Water somehow quench lust?"

That pastor learned that the way to fight lust of any kind is not by threats, but by feeding your faith with the precious and magnificent promise that one day you will see God. If someone promises you a delicious steak dinner tonight, why fill your stomach with fast food beforehand?

Let me give you another example from Scripture. In 2 Corinthians 9 Paul is trying to encourage the Corinthian believers to be generous in giving towards a collection he was making for the poor in Jerusalem. In v. 7 he says he refuses to twist anyone's arm because God loves a cheerful giver. But how can we become cheerful givers? How can we become the kind of people that are willing to let go of our resources for the sake of others? In v. 8 he tells us, **"God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed."** That's a promise. How can you and I be freed from the need to stash away our money for ourselves? Trust in God's promise that he is able to make all grace abound to you so that you have an abundance for every good deed.

CONCLUSION

We can't afford to ignore the promises of God. They flow out of his person. To know God is to receive his promises. They are precious and magnificent showered upon us to fill us with joy. And they motivate us to grow and become more and more like Christ. Dwight L. Moody once said, "Let a man feed for a month on the promises of God, and he will not talk of how poor he is." That's my challenge to you this morning. Let's take a couple of months and feed on the promises of God. And let's see what God does as a result.