

*Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,  
To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:*

<sup>2</sup> *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*

<sup>3</sup> *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup>Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:1-4)*

### Great and Precious Promises

“I promise.” Those are important words. As a parent, I say them. Sometimes, though, I worry about whether I’ve consistently kept my promises to my children. I try to. But to them, do my promises seem like empty words? When they hear me say, “I promise,” do they figure, “Right. That’s really going to happen.” I hope not. But I know that I haven’t kept 100% of all the promises I’ve made. Even though I want to be a man of my word, I’m a sinner. Too many times, I haven’t come through. For that reason, sometimes I struggle with my job as your pastor. You see, you could say that it’s my job to repeat God’s promises. I can’t count the number of times I’ve said “God promises” in sermons or Bible classes or in counseling. It’s my job to say that because those promises are the gospel. But sometimes in a sinful world, sometimes when life is tough, it feels a little lame to say that. Now, the truth is God’s promises are never lame. It only feels that way to me because my heart is imperfect. I’ve had too much experience with people who don’t keep their promises, including myself. The point of the word of God that we have before us this morning is that God’s promises are the right thing to say because they’re greater than any promise any sinner could ever make to us. God gives us **great and precious promises**.

#### I.

**Great and precious promises give us peace now.** What makes a promise precious? The benefit that comes when it’s kept, right? If I promise my children that I’ll play a game with them tonight, that’s a nice a promise. But if I promise them that I’ll pay for their college tuition, that’s a much more valuable promise. The greatest and most valuable promises we will ever receive come from God in Christ. Peter tells us the benefit those promises give us. He says, “**Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.**”

What is peace? Well, what would it mean to have peace in the Middle East? It would mean that the Israelis and the Palestinians stopped shooting at each other. It would mean that we could bring our soldiers home from Iraq and Afghanistan without those countries collapsing into civil war. Peace is an end to warfare. Peter prays that God would give us Christians peace in our lives today and every day. But the day-to-day gift of peace depends on the one great gift of peace that God gave us two thousand years ago. Jesus put an end to warfare between us and God.

Now, does that sound strange to you? I mean, can you remember a time in your life when you were at war with God? When God was your enemy? Most of us would probably say no. But that time did exist. Before we were believers, we were at war with God. Sin makes us God’s enemies. Every one of us was born a sinner. That’s hard to accept. The idea that a baby is guilty on the day it’s conceived is something we would never accept if God didn’t say it in his word. But he does say it. He says that the heart that does not have faith in him is his enemy. It does not submit to God’s will – it doesn’t obey him. God says that it cannot obey him. No matter how good unbelievers appear to be – and I bet you know some people who aren’t Christians whom you like and respect, maybe more than some Christians you know – but no matter how good unbelievers appear to be, they cannot obey God.

We were all born enemies of God as well. Left to ourselves, we would’ve spent eternity in hell. But God reached down from heaven and changed that. He moved us from being his enemies to being his friends. He did that by sending Jesus, the Son of God, to live and die and rise for all people everywhere.

Jesus came because we enemies of God could not cross over to God’s side. We could not accept his word and believe what he teaches. We could not live the way he commands. But Jesus could and he did. Peter

says that **“through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ [we] have received a faith as precious”** as his own. Jesus was not born a sinner. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. So he was the only human being ever born on God’s side. He stayed on God’s side his whole life. He lived in perfect love and perfect obedience to God. He didn’t do that because he needed anything. He did that because we needed everything. Jesus was perfect for us. He was perfect so that he could replace all the sins we’ve ever committed with his righteous life. In perfect righteousness, Jesus obeyed his Father and died on the cross for us. He stepped up in God’s court and let our punishment fall on him. All the pain and sorrow, all the hell and the physical death – all that our sins had coming Jesus took in our place.

Then Jesus rose. Death is the punishment for sin. Since Jesus had no sin, since he was guilty of nothing, death could not hold him. Jesus rose to make it clear that his righteousness counts for us. Knowing that righteousness of Christ is what makes us believers. It gives us grace and peace. It gives us the promise of eternal life.

That promise of peace with God gives us peace in our hearts. We’re free now from guilt. It’s amazing how good we are at beating ourselves up over our sins. I’ve passed many sleepless nights because I was tormented by my failings as a husband or father or pastor. Do you know what that’s like? Do you hear your own voice played back to you and wish that you could undo the things you did and said in the past? Do you find that sometimes, you’re cruising along and bam, you run smack into a memory of your own guilt? Do you torment yourself? Jesus tells us that all that sin is gone. God has wiped his anger and our sin away. God sees us as though we were Jesus and he promises never even to bring those past sins up.

That peace even extends to fear and anxiety about the practical matters of life. When we have to go to the hospital, when we lose our jobs, when anxiety churns in our stomachs, those great and precious promises of God are the only real source of peace. The God who sent his Son to die and rise for you is not going to let anything take you from him. The God who overcame our sin and our hatred of him is going to do everything to keep our faith alive so that we live with him forever. He has the power and the love to end whatever we’re suffering. If he does not, he promises that even greater blessings will come through that pain.

When we look at the cross and the empty tomb, we see the proof of those promises. We can’t always understand what God is doing. We can’t always see where we’re going. Some of God’s blessings still lie in the future. That’s the nature of a promise. It’s something that we don’t have yet – at least, not in our hands. But all those blessings are ours because God promises them. That gives us peace.

## II.

This whole reading is about the blessings those promises give us here and now. You cannot understand those blessings without having an eye on eternity. They are promises. But the promises change everything here and now. They make our lives different because they make us different. **Great and precious promises give us a new life in Christ.**

Peter says, **“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”** What do we need for godliness? First and foremost, we need the desire to live the way God calls us to. If we don’t want to live for God, no amount of law can make us live that way. You see it in society. Some people will only obey the law as long as they’re in sight of a police officer. As soon as they’re out of sight, they do what they want. Even a carrot and stick approach – rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior – has limited results. At some point, a person has to want to do what’s right. If they don’t, they won’t.

Alongside the desire to live a godly life we need to understand what that life is like. Sometimes, we don’t know what God wants. People ask me all the time what they should do in specific situations. We need to learn what God says. Finally, with desire and understanding, we need power to live as God commands. We need the strength to fight off our evil desires and actually do the good that we want to do. I bet every one of us has had the experience of wanting to be better parents or spouses or friends than we actually were at some moment in our personal history. We wanted to do the right thing but we were too weak to overcome our own selfishness.

The desire, the understanding and the power all are ours. God gives us everything we need for godliness through our knowledge of Jesus – that means through the gospel. In the gospel, Jesus reached into our hearts and made us Christians. We didn’t choose to come over to God’s side. God chose us and changed us.

Peter says, “... he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” What does it mean to “participate in the divine nature”? Jesus lives in our hearts. When God made us believers, he created a new person inside us. He put a believer in our hearts. God tells us that he lives with that believer inside us. That believer communes with God. We are in Christ and Christ is in us. By a miracle of God’s grace, inside us there is a person who loves God. There’s a person who wants to live the way God calls us to. There’s a person who understands what that means. God gave you that gift when he gave you faith.

But that new man, as the Bible calls him, is not alone. That new man shares our heart with the old man, the sinful nature, the part of us that rebels against God. So for as long as we live here, we Christians are at war with ourselves. We’re fighting a battle to follow God rather than give in to our own sinful desires. Sometimes, we take the easy way out and let the sinner win. Sometimes, we let that sinner tell us what we want and even lust after. Sometimes, people shake their heads at us and call us hypocrites because it’s so hard to live as Christ commands us to.

But God’s great and precious promises give us the power to fight against that sinner inside us. We don’t have the strength to overcome our sinful nature. But every time we hear about Jesus and his love and forgiveness, God is recharging the new man in our hearts. Every time we hear God promise to keep our faith alive until we reach heaven, God is lifting up the believer inside us and strengthening him to fight the good fight. God is giving us an escape from our own sinful desires.

That is a very precious promise because we all have those sinful desires. We all have sins that we like to commit, sins that we struggle against and hold off for one day only to commit them the next day. Then we feel horrible because we lost again. In Christ, God gives us the power to change. To wage war against ourselves and win. We will win when we reach eternal life. That old man will be gone and only the new man will be left. We’ll never sin again. We win here, every time God gives us the strength to resist that old man.

But every day, the battle starts over. Yesterday’s defeats do not mean that God has abandoned us. And yesterday’s victories don’t mean we’re in the clear. Each day, we rely on God and his power for today. We fight the good fight. We strive to live for him. But we will never be perfect in this life. For that we have to wait for eternity. While we wait, God gives us the gospel to comfort us each day. As we struggle and fail, God forgives us again. Through that love and forgiveness, he picks us up to fight for one more day. His promises change us.

In life, the value of a promise depends on what it does for you. But the sureness of the promise depends on the promiser. I can’t promise you that your surgeries will all be successful. I can’t promise you that you’ll find a job that will pay your bills. I struggle just to keep my promises to play games with my children at night. I don’t have the power to overcome my sinful nature, and neither do you. So our promises are as feeble as we are. But God’s promises are different. God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is making these great and precious promises. They will all come true. My friends, rely on them! Amen.