

At the Corner of Promise and God Part Two

2 Peter 1:1-11

This morning we're gonna be finishing up the series *At the Corner of Life and God* and next week we will be starting a study in the book of 1 Cor. that I am calling *Letter to a Really Messed up Church*. 1st Corinthians covers a lot of ground as Paul addresses a number of important – and at times controversial – issues that the church of Corinth was dealing with, and still deals with today, so I am looking forward to what we'll discover as we go through 1 Cor. together.

Last week we met at the corner of promise and God and that's where I want us to meet again this morning so let's read **2 Peter 1:1-11** together. (Read and pray)

The illustration I used last week was the Keystone Pipeline, a pipeline that would move oil from Canada through the US all the way down to Houston, TX. The oil is there in Canada, but a pipeline is needed to channel the oil where it needs to go. Canada can't just spray oil in our general direction and expect it to go where it's supposed to go or accomplish anything of use.

In the same way, God doesn't just "spray" His power in our general direction and hope something good comes of it. 2 Peter 1:1-11 describes a kind of spiritual pipeline that God uses to convey His power to believers and to help us walk this pipeline and see all the connecting points between God's promises and our lives I broke them down into five connecting points, which all happen to begin with the letter "p".

- I. **Power** – at the beginning of the pipeline is God's power to convey life and godliness to us. Life speaks of the internal life of God within us, and godliness speaks of the external outworking of that life.
- II. **Promise** – next we saw that that power flows to us through God's very great and precious promises. Every aspect of the believer's life and future hinge on God's promises. How can we be sure that Christ's blood has cleansed us of our sin? Because God promises it. How do we know that we are saved by grace through faith? Because God promises it, and God is always faithful to keep His promises.

So, moving on, God's power flows to us through God's promises which then flows to us in a very specific way and that brings us to the third "p" word, which is an unusual word. It's the word...

III. Partakers

*...by which (by His glory and excellence) he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them (through the promises) you may become **partakers** of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desires. (vs. 4)*

God's power travels through the conduit of God's promises *so that through them* (through the promises) we may become *partakers* of His divine nature. Now, what does that mean? It sounds like we become little gods, but that is not at all what Peter is saying. The NIV uses the word "participate" – through God's promises we participate in the divine nature. When a person comes to Christ in faith – believing God's promise to save all who trust in him – that person receives the promised Holy Spirit. God Himself takes up residence in us through the Person of the Holy Spirit and we are born again with a new nature and this new nature is completely engaged and dependent on God. That's why Paul could make this

paradoxical statement in Gal. 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ: it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...*

What Paul is saying is that his old, sinful nature has been crucified with Christ and his new nature is dependent on and powered by Christ who lives in him through the Holy Spirit. That new nature has new desires, desires to please and obey God. The new nature wants the promise of godliness rather than the promise of sin.

Peter says that by becoming partakers of this divine nature we have escaped the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire (vs. 4). The old pipeline delivered corruption and death to us via the promise of sin, the new pipeline delivers us to life and godliness via the promises of God. The sinful desire mentioned in verse 4 is the opposite of the godliness mentioned in verse 3 and both are powered by promise.

We live our lives totally on the basis of promise. Everything we do has a promise attached to it. Everything we do we do because we believe it holds a promise for us. You go to work because you are promised a paycheck which promises you the ability to purchase things, which promises you that life will be better. If you decide to quit your job and move to someplace like Lebanon and work really hard and make no money, (such as our friend Andrew Wilber has done), it's because a greater promise has won your heart: you believe that doing this will reward you in a way that makes the sacrifice and danger and hard work and lack of creature comforts worth it! That reward might be the joy of giving your life to something bigger than you, or the joy of seeing hurting people cared for, or the sense of God's pleasure as you serve Him, or it might be all three, but you do it because it holds a promise for you.

If you study hard in school it's because there's a promise of a career, or you love the subject (and it promises the enrichment of knowledge), or you're afraid of failing grades (and what they promise you). If you practice to become a great musician it's because there's a promise (might be adoring fans or the artistic satisfaction of making good music). If you try to be the funny guy at the party, it's because there's a promise attached: maybe you just enjoy a good laugh! Or the promise might think people will like you more if you make them laugh. But there's a promise attached. If you don't like to have people get close to you, again it's because there's a promise attached: being isolated is better than being hurt. Like an onion, the layers of why we do what we do can be peeled back and back, but there's always a promise attached. We live our lives totally on the basis of promise.

And so the power of sin is the power of promise. Sin doesn't force you to sin; it coerces you to sin through your desires. It hooks a desire in you and promises that if you fulfill that desire you will be glad you did.

Road kill

The other day Matthew and I were driving and we passed a possum lying in the road. I think it was dead – it looked dead - but you never know with possums. But a few miles later we passed a possum that was either really dead, or had gone to elaborate lengths to fake his death because there were blood and guts all over the road. But I've always found it fascinating how when there's a dead animal in the road, there are crows picking at it. They'll keep eating until that last possible moment before flying away as the car passes it. Then, in the rear view mirror, they're back at it. It's irresistible to them. It must look and smell and taste SO good to them! I've often wondered, what does it smell like and taste like to them?

But I have never personally been tempted to pull over and taste it myself and my guess is that you probably haven't either. When we pass a bloated deer carcass lying on the side of the road, it typically doesn't take a lot of self-control to keep from pulling over and digging in. We're not tempted to eat road kill because there's no desire to eat it. It holds no promise so it holds no temptation. But there are other kinds of road kill – just as corrupt and disgusting - that do hold promise out to us because they hook a sinful desire in us. Lust calls us to pull over for the dead carcass of immorality and promises us a kind of gratification if we do. Anger calls us to pull over and vent when we don't get something we want, promising that we'll feel a lot better if we do. Bitterness calls us to the rotting corpse of hatred and wishing something bad would happen to the person we are bitter against. On and on: selfishness to live for ourselves. Laziness to procrastinate doing the thing we know we should do, so that we can enjoy the moment of laziness. Sin promises great things – but it always deceives and never delivers. There's always a false promise attached to sin.

When God saves us, He does so much more than just tell us, “now stop sinning!” He gives us a new nature, a nature that believes the promises of God are better than the promises of sin. A nature that wants what God promises *more* than what sin promises. We are freed from the grip of sin's promises (*having escaped from the corruption...*) because we are gripped by much superior promises – the promises of Christ. As long as we are alive there will be an ongoing battle between the new nature and the old nature, but through the promises of God we have been given a new nature and ultimately that nature will, by the power of God, win out. So the power of God flowing through the promises of God enables us to partake of Christ's nature freeing us from the corruption of sinful desires and leads to the next link in the pipeline and the fourth “p” word:

IV. Practice (vv. 5-10)

Here is a strange paradox: Peter tells us in verse 3 that God's power has given us everything, then in verse 5 he says therefore make every effort to supplement, or add to, all that God has done. If He's given us everything, how can we add to it?

This is the paradox of the Christian life. It is all of God: His power, His promises, His Spirit in us. We can't add to our salvation and Peter isn't telling us to. He says, “*for this very reason...*” For what reason? Because God has given us His power, His promises, and His Spirit. We don't add our effort in order to be saved, but because we are saved.

Verse 10: *if you practice these qualities you will never fall*. Believing God's promises always has an effect on how we live. The power of God that flows to us through His promises will always result in a change of *practice*.

Peter then details seven qualities that we are to add and keep adding (they should be increasing) to our faith. We don't have the time to go over them – that could easily be an entire message, but they are qualities of character beginning with virtue – the same word used about Christ in verse 3 meaning moral excellence – and ending with love. So we are to make every effort and be diligent to grow in Christ-like character, not to be saved, but because we are saved.

Growing in these qualities has a powerful effect on our lives. First, verse 8 tells us that it keeps us from being ineffective or unfruitful in Christ. It keeps us from an empty, wasted life. The Christian who isn't trying to grow in his or her godliness has a serious vision problem: *for whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins (vs. 9)*. If there is no ongoing effect of the gospel on our lives than, in effect, we are in danger of forgetting that we were

saved and forgiven. This is not a good place to be in. And here's where Peter gives us really good advice: rather than live the bare minimum Christian existence and always have this nagging fear in the back of the mind: am I really saved? Am I really a Christian? verse 10 urges us to be diligent to confirm our calling and election by practicing these qualities. As we practice these qualities and grow in Christ-like character there will be a deepening assurance. This isn't talking about salvation by works or a legalistic mindset that "I'm saved because I'm doing this and this and this." But there is an inevitable correlation between seeing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and our assurance that we are indeed saved.

Hitting the switch

Recently our garage door opener broke and to save money, I decided to try and install a new one myself. I'm not the handiest guy in the world so whenever I tackle a major home repair there is legitimate cause for concern and in this case I really was not confident I could do it right. So after spending hours installing the new mechanism and doing all the necessary wiring, the moment of truth finally came. The moment when I would hit the switch and see if the garage door would actually open. I thought it was all correctly wired and installed but I needed to confirm it by hitting the switch. I had this reluctance to hit the switch out of fear that nothing would happen, but I needed to know so I hit the switch and...it worked!

How do we know that God's power is operating in our lives? How do we know that His promises have given us a new nature that simultaneously frees us from the corruption of this dying world and empowers us to live godly lives? We are to make every effort to hit the switch – confirm that God's power is flowing through our lives. We can't add virtue or self-control or love to our lives by our own power, but we can grow in these virtues by His power, but we need to hit the switch! When the road kill of sin calls me to pull over, I am to make every effort to add moral excellence to my faith and choose not to sin. When bitterness calls me to vengeful or resentful attitudes, I am to make every effort to add love and brotherly affection to my faith and choose the promise of God over the promise of sin. Our making the effort to add these qualities to our faith isn't providing the power – the power comes from God through His promises – it's more like hitting the switch.

A primary reason that some Christians lack assurance that they are saved, and a deep joy in that salvation, is because they aren't hitting the switch. They believe in Christ and his promises, but aren't doing much with that belief. Evidence of their salvation is minimal and that bothers them. And with good reason: the Bible tells us that believing God's promises will have an effect on how we live. We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.

Conversely, when we are diligent to grow in the qualities that express Christ's life in us, our assurance and joy in our salvation deepens and grows. The garage door opener was correctly installed before I ever hit the switch, but hitting the switch and watching that door open and close assured me that it was all working and removed any doubt. Assurance comes from hitting the switch, from making every effort to add these qualities to our faith.

Briefly, the fifth "p" word is...

V. Provided

Let's finish up by looking at verse 11: *For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:11*

This is, in a sense, the end of the pipeline. By being diligent to practice these qualities there will richly be provided an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What does this mean? We know that we aren't saved by being virtuous or godly or loving, so Peter's not saying our entrance into Christ's kingdom is provided by our doing those things. He's talking about the depth and joy of our welcome into Christ's kingdom! About the increase of rewards that await those who serve the Lord faithfully.

There are some who, Paul says in 1 Cor. 3, get in by the skin of their teeth, all the work of their lives go up in flames like wood, hay, and stubble, but they get in through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Others find that the work of their lives, when tested by God, built on the foundation of Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones.

Some, though saved, will live this life with a depressing sense of fear and uncertainty and others will experience a growing sense of joy and assurance making their entrance into Jesus' kingdom wide and rich and on that day will also receive greater rewards which will only expand their joy. Peter is encouraging us, don't just try to get in by the skin of your teeth. Be diligent to confirm God's calling and election by practicing these qualities and this will provide a rich entrance into the kingdom of our Lord.

Conclusion:

God has provided us salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. It is free, given by grace not by our merit. But let's remember that God's promises provide much more than an unchanged life fearfully hanging on to hope that we are saved without any evidence that we are. His promises are the pipeline through which His power flows, changing our nature and our practice, so that we can walk in joyful assurance that we belong to Christ and he belongs to us and to empower us to live, not for the empty promises of this world which inevitably fade and rot, but for the amazing promises of Christ's eternal kingdom.

All of this is from God. With this New Year before us, let's make every effort to pass by the road kill and add the qualities of godliness to our character. Let's believe God's promises and hit the switch!