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“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises,” II Peter 1:4.

## Precious Promises

**Lesson Aim:** To note that God's promises are precious to those who believe.

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**Topic:** God: Promises of.

## INTRODUCTION

What is a promise? One has defined a promise as “an assurance on the part of another of some good for which we are dependent on him.” A promise is of no value, therefore, if the promiser is not able to give. Neither is a promise compulsory beyond the expectation that the promiser is a man of his word.

There are no promises like God's promises. Because of His true and faithful nature, every promise He makes is true and faithful, Revelation 21:5. No other can offer promises which are so sure of performance, so comforting in content, so amazing in grace, or so wonderful in fulfillment.

If the Lord promises anything, He will do it. **“God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”** Numbers 23:19. God will make no promise which He will later be unable or unwilling to perform. His word is unailing.

God always applies His promises to His children in a personal way. Someone told of a man who constantly put his name in the Bible as he read it. For instance, “Let not your heart be troubled, John; ye believe in God, John; believe also in me, John.” In like manner every promise of God is personally applied to the believer by the Word of Him who cannot lie.

God's promises are many but every one of them is reliable. I Kings

8:56 testifies, **“Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise . . .”** Indeed, **“The word is not slack concerning His promise . . .”** II Peter 3:9. **“For all the promises of God in him (Jesus) are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us,”** II Corinthians 1:20. It is safe to trust the promises of God because of the trustworthiness of the God who promises.

## EXPOSITION

### 1. THE CONTENT OF THE PROMISES.

What are these promises here designated “exceeding great and precious” by the Apostle Peter? Observe that no promises are itemized nor is one clearly referred to. It is possible, of course, to call any and every promise of God “exceeding great and precious.” Perhaps no promise is enumerated here that this phrase may be applied to all. So whatever promise is needed for this day is such a great and precious one.

Peter seems to indicate that the promises relating to salvation are foremost in his mind. At least it is by these promises that the divine (God-like) nature is received. This would include promises regarding regeneration, preservation, and redemption at the Second Coming. So the promises regarding salvation are not one, but many.

Nor does the subject of salvation exhaust all God’s promises in the Word. Indeed, the Bible is so full of promises that someone has called it a book of promises. Open your Bible at any place, let it fall open at random, and observe somewhere on the two pages a promise of God! J. Neibor has well written, “Besides the promise to pardon from sin, there are promises to sustain in time of trial, promises of guidance in time of darkness, promises of strength in time of weakness, promises to aid in time of need, promises to protect in time of danger, promises to comfort in time of sorrow, promises of His presence in life and also in death . . . There are promises for the present life and the distant future. To those who die in Christ there are promises of resurrection and immortality. How dark all would be apart from these promises.”

The promises of God are “exceeding great and precious.” The greatness of the promise will be determined by its scope. The preciousness of the promise will be determined by the nature of the thing promised and our assurance that the Promiser can and will keep His promise. Is there really any question about God keeping His promises! Assuredly not!

However, Peter goes a step beyond the mere words used in making a promise. The term “promises” indicate the things promised rather than the act of promising. For instance, in Acts 1:4 the disciples are instructed by Jesus to remain in Jerusalem to “wait for the promise of the Father, which ye have heard of me.” He did not mean, “Wait until God makes you a promise,” but rather, “Wait until you receive that which the Father has promised, i.e., the Holy Spirit.”

So Peter is not merely saying, “God has made many pledges to us which are great and wonderful.” He is actually saying, “God has given us many things which are exceeding great and precious in the faithful performance of His word.” Not merely the act of promising, but the thing promised and already received, is “exceeding great and exceeding precious.” All believers can respond with a hearty, “Amen.”

## II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROMISES

1. Divine nature.—Grammatically, Peter uses a purpose and result clause to set out his idea. God gave us the exceeding great and precious fulfillment of His promises (this is a purpose) so that we might be partakers of His divine nature (this is the result). Read verse 4 again.

To be a "partaker" means to share in, to be a partner, to have fellowship, to be a companion. The simplest translation would be, “that we might be sharers of the divine nature.” A divine nature is simply a God-like nature! Peter's statement is amazing. He says God has given an exceeding great and precious fulfillment of His equally great promises and that as a result of this every believer becomes a “sharer of the God-like nature! It is so easy to say but so difficult to comprehend its scope of grace.

Observe, however, that verse three states this miracle comes by his divine power. If any man receives God's nature, he must receive it by the power of God. Before we could become like God, He must become like us in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Divine One became partaker of human nature that we humans might become partakers of the Divine nature. Because of the Lord Jesus, the vilest sinner can put his trust in the Saviour, and receive this God-like nature, and so become a fit companion of the Lord!

Moreover, this divine nature is not reserved for a chosen few sanctified saints. It is shared by all those who are saved. **“Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,”** Romans 8:9. If you are trusting Jesus right now, you are sharing the God-like nature with Him right now.

2. Sanctification.—There is a great practical side to this new relationship the believer enjoys with God. Those who have received a God-like nature have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Sanctification is the practical expression of salvation.

With the divine nature to resist evil and the divine power to enable us, there is no reason for a child of God to be entangled in the pollutions of the world, II Peter 2:20. Peter said the believer has already escaped” (past tense). This is not a victory yet to be won. It is already won and is but to be claimed in joy.

The believer's problem in the world is lust. Lust is unlawful desire. While the new nature received in Christ is opposed to lust and corruption, the old nature is weak and craves it. God saved the believer for the purpose expressed in I Peter 4:2, **“That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”** It is evident, therefore, that living in lust is not living in God's will. Having already escaped, the believer lives in lust only if he willingly submits himself to do so. The war that is raging within between the flesh and the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26) can be won by the believer. **“Ye are of God little children, and have overcome them; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world,”** I John 4:4. God provides a way to escape every temptation when His children are tried, I Corinthians 10:13.

3. Growth.—The believer is never content to remain where he is in spiritual development. God's Spirit places within him the yearning for divine things. Yet, this desire can be quenched and spiritual growth neglected. That far too many believers are in this case is sadly true.

Yet the admonition is to “give all diligence” to spiritual growth. Diligence means haste, speed, earnestness, effort and zeal. It speaks of active, dedicated, and steady application to any matter. What a difference it would make if all Christians were diligent, awake and looking for opportunities to serve the Lord Christ. Diligence makes us develop spiritually just as exercise makes us grow strong physically. Spiritual growth is never isolated in one area only. Each area of growth is an aid to growth in other areas. For instance, growth in knowledge will increase faith while growth in faith will inspire service. It would be proper to translate Peter's admonition in verses 5-7 in this manner: “Let your faith produce virtue, and virtue lead on to knowledge, and knowledge produce temperance, and temperance develop patience, and patience issue in godliness, and godliness be expressed in brotherly kindness, and brotherly kindness grow into Godly love.” The steps of spiritual growth are clearly set forth. Let us measure ourselves by them.

(1) Faith.—Faith is as the leader of the choir and each virtue is as a member. It is the basis of all relationship with God and without it God cannot be pleased in any wise, Hebrews 11:6. We are not told to supply faith; that comes from God. But from our confidence in Him all other virtues spring.

(2) Virtue.—The idea is not so much of chastity as of valor, manliness, courage. It is Christian fortitude or “energetic faith.” Without vigor of soul there would be a weakness for Jesus in Christian living. Its idea is to “be a man” for Christ.

(3) Knowledge.—Spiritual discernment as to what is right and what is wrong is essential to effective living and witnessing. The word for absolute knowledge is not used in the New Testament. This word is rather “growing knowledge” and means to say the believer never quits increasing in knowledge of the Lord.

(4) Temperance.—This is the blessed grace of self-control. It will forbid excesses of any kind. It will put a check on the lips, the heart, the hands, the mind. All our fleshly lusts will be kept in submission. Knowledge of right and wrong must issue in the discipline of self-control. Read Proverbs 16:32 for a surprising evaluation.

(5) Patience.—The grace of endurance is essential to Christian living. The man who has learned self-control will be able to stay under the load when the going is difficult. Patience and hope are joined in Christian endurance. This is not indifference nor just resignation to the inevitable. It is an energetic bearing of one's problems in the spirit of Christ. This is a most needed grace in Christian living.

(6) Godliness.—God-likeness is true piety which is the highest demonstration to the world that one belongs to God. It gives a right tone to all conduct and keeps a proper disposition in the heart. It is more than religious form being true communion with the Lord which expresses itself in worship and obedience. It expresses itself in a pure and lovely character. Godliness is Christ manifest in the lives of His people.

(7) Brotherly kindness.—Kindness and good will showed between Christians are next in order. True piety will express itself in attitude toward the brethren. See I John 4:20-21. This Imperative is repeated in Romans 12:10; I Peter 2:17 and I Peter 3:8. If the world could see more true brotherly affection between believers it would take more serious note of their profession.

(8) Charity.—Translated “love” in newer English versions. Charity translates a Greek word which is almost always used when speaking of the love of God. It is a love which goes out to all alike, related or unrelated,

friend or foe. True “brotherly kindness” should mark our relations with Christian brethren, but holy love should go out from our hearts to all mankind. This is not a love of personal attachment but a love which seeks the welfare of its object. We must not stop with brotherly love, but like God who loved us, go on to love those who are undeserving of our love. This is the way God would have it be. Are you this mature in spirit?

4. Fruit.—If these things are your natural and rightful possession, and are in you in abundance, they so constitute you that you are not idle nor unfruitful in the things of the Lord Jesus Christ, verse 8. Here is the key to Christian fruitfulness. Jesus said it is the Father's will that we bear fruit and that He is glorified when we bear much fruit, John 15:1-8. Serving God, therefore, is not just a matter of going to church and living honorably. It is a cultivation of the graces of the Lord Jesus so that life actually produces fruit to the glory of God. These Christian virtues make one to be neither idle (barren) nor without results (unfruitful).

Could it be that the reason for fruitlessness in so many believers is that they have failed to grow? Yes! It is not only possible, but also that is exactly the reason. A little boy who fell out of bed gave the reason, “I guess I went to sleep too close to where I got in.” So many believers are content to trust Jesus but go little further in spiritual life. They are infants who never learn to take the meat of the Word and whose lives are worth little to God. God has saved us to produce fruit. The only way we can produce fruit for His glory is by growing in grace. Study, pray, exercise, and grow!

### III. THE ASSURANCE OF THE PROMISES.

1. The majesty of Jesus.—Peter said “**. . . we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . For he received from God the Father honour and glory,**” verses 16-17. All the promises of God are bound up in Jesus Christ. “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” II Corinthians 1:20.

The majesty and deity of Jesus were manifest on the Mount of Transfiguration. There light emanated from His body and caused His clothing to shine and glisten. Two who had been dead for centuries—Moses and Elijah—came and talked with Him. The voice of the Father spoke His approbation from heaven. God's promises are assured when they rest in the majestic person of the Lord Jesus.

2. The testimony of the Father.—Just as at the baptism of Jesus, so also at His transfiguration, the voice of the Father spoke from heaven. “**While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a**

**voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him,”** Matthew 17:5. All the promises of God are grounded in Jesus. He seems to say to us, “Behold my Son and my delight in Him. Upon Him I place my approval. Upon His faithfulness I pledge to fulfill every promise made to man.” Blessed assurance!

3. The report of eyewitnesses.—Phillips translates verses 16-18 in this manner: “We were not following a cleverly written-up story when we told you about the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ—we actually saw his majesty with our own eyes. He received honor and glory from God the Father Himself when that voice said to him out of the sublime glory of heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' We actually heard that voice speaking from heaven while we were with him on the sacred mountain. The word of prophecy was fulfilled in our hearing!” Both sight and sound confirms the testimony of the Father that His promises rest secure in Jesus. Peter, James and John were there on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus. They testify, **“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you . . .”** (I John 1:3) and their testimony is true.

4. The testimony of the Holy Spirit.—The witness of the transfiguration is made more sure by the agreement of prophecy, verses 19-21. Not by private study, but by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Bible has been written and is to be interpreted. Foretelling of the coming of the Lord, records of the person and work of the Lord, and present understanding of the significance of the Lord are all the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God. The witness of men who had seen and heard, plus the testimony of the Father who twice spoke His approval from heaven, is reinforced by the witness of the Holy Spirit who breathed out the message of the Bible. These all agree that God's promises are secure and settled in Jesus Christ.

## CONCLUSION

What God does and says is for all eternity. There is no change nor shadow caused by turning in Him, James 1:17. His promises are as sure and certain as He is reliable. Don't question; listen! Don't doubt; believe! God gives assurance with His promises.

**“Wherein God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;**

**Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec,”** Hebrews 6:17-20.

Thus does God reassure us of the reliability of his promises. They are both precious and faithful. Without His faithfulness the foundations of Christianity would crumble. Without His faithfulness the believer has no hope. But the promises of God are true. In them each man may find the solution to his sin guilt, overcome the world, grow to spiritual maturity, and bear the fruit which glorifies God.

**“Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations,”** Deuteronomy 7:9.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is the aim of today's lesson?
2. What is a promise?
3. Why are God's promises to us precious?
4. What is “the divine nature”?
5. What is sanctification?
6. How does the divine nature in the believer express itself?
7. In what areas should a Christian grow?
8. How has God assured us that His promises are faithful?
9. What promises of God are precious to you?
10. What have you received from fulfillment of His promises?