

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 9 August 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Great and Precious Promises

2 Peter 1:4

There is a story that has been told and retold over the last couple generations. It is the story of a very wealthy man in the early twentieth century, who was an art collector. This man travelled the world, and purchased priceless paintings by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet, and many others. His collection was much renowned and coveted by art collectors the world over. His son had a passion for artwork, as well; and as he grew into manhood, he developed an expert eye for art, just as his father had.

But then, the young man's number came up in the draft, and he was called away to fight for his country. As the world became engulfed in war, the weeks dragged on into months; and soon, Christmas time was approaching. Then, the father received a telegram, in which he was informed that his son was missing in action. Days later, he received the awful confirmation that his son had, indeed, died on the battlefield. In the short time that his son had been fighting for his country, he had already distinguished himself by rescuing the lives of dozens of his fellow soldiers; and at the very moment of his death, he had been in the process of rushing a fellow soldier to the medic.

Needless to say, the father was filled with sorrow that Christmas season, as he sat alone in his house without his son. But then, on Christmas day, he heard a knock on his door. At the door stood the very young man whom his son had rescued just before he died. (He had been honourably discharged from service, on account of the disabling injuries that he had received on the battlefield.) The young man introduced himself, and gave his condolences to the old man; and then, he presented him with a package. In the package was a painting of the old man's son, which he himself had painted, in his son's honour. Though it was the work of an amateur, it was, nonetheless, a striking likeness of his son.

This painting immediately became the old man's favourite piece of art. All his other treasures now took the backseat to this portrait of his son, which hung above his mantle. Over the coming months, the father received report after report of the brave acts of his son, who had saved the lives of many soldiers on the battlefield. But then, the old man himself became ill; and in the spring of the next year, he passed away.

It didn't take long for the art world to hear of the old man's death. Wealthy art collectors from all over the world eagerly awaited the day when his art collection would be auctioned off, so that they could add some of his treasures to their own collections. According to the old man's wishes, his collection was to be auctioned off on Christmas day of that year, in honour of the day when he had received the portrait of his son. And so, on that Christmas day, a great crowd of wealthy people gathered around to make their bids. The auctioneer struck the gavel; and the first piece of artwork was presented for auction. It wasn't the work of Picasso, or Monet; it was the work of an unknown soldier, who had painted a portrait of the old man's son. Faces were filled with contempt and disgust, as they beheld the amateur work of art. The room was silent. No one would make a bid. The auctioneer asked if anyone would take it for \$100; but still, no one responded. Finally, one of the art dealers asked when they were going to get on with the auction. Others echoed his disgust. However, the auctioneer insisted that the auction could not proceed until someone took this piece of art. Finally, a friend of the family, who had known the boy when he was

growing up, offered all the money that he had, which was \$10. The auctioneer then struck the gavel, and declared the portrait to be “Sold”—and then proceeded to announce that the auction was over! With stunned disbelief and anger, the people asked him what he meant. The auctioneer then explained. “It’s simple,” he said. “According to the old man’s will, whoever takes the portrait of his son gets the whole collection!”

Now, though this is a fictional story, it illustrates, in a beautiful way, the promises that God has given to us. God’s Son died to save *our* lives from eternal destruction; and those who will take *Him*, take all! Those who will receive the Son of God not only receive a complete acquittal from sin’s death penalty, and an eternal home in heaven, but they also receive all the spiritual riches that are in Christ. All “spiritual riches in heavenly places” are bequeathed to the sinner who will believe on the Son. Everything that we could possibly need in order to live our lives for God, is bestowed to those who will receive the Son of God.

My friends, this Book is filled to overflowing with wonderful, precious promises from God. It is a priceless treasure trove. It is God’s love letter to *you*. Unlike a collection of paintings, which is lifeless and dead, and good for nothing except to look at, God’s promises are *living*, and powerful, and life-transforming! However, all these wonderful promises will do you no good until you open up the Book, read it, and find out what the promises are! We sang the song “Standing on the Promises” this morning; but I’m here to tell you that you can’t stand on promises if you don’t know what they are! The title of this message is ***Great and Precious Promises***.

Read 2 Peter 1:2-4.

I. The Source of God’s Promises: the Bible

Verse 4 starts off with an important word—the word “*whereby*.” “*Whereby*” simply means “by which,” or “through which.” What, then, is this thing “through which” we are given all these “great and precious promises”? Well, let’s go back to **verse 3** to find out. (**Read verse 3 again.**)

The thing “through which” we are given God’s promises is “the **knowledge** of him”; and the “**knowledge of him**” is simply another way of saying “**the Scriptures**.” Why does Peter call the Scriptures “the knowledge of God”? Because *the Scriptures* reveal the “knowledge” of who Jesus is, and of how to be saved, and of how to find the power of Jesus Christ in our lives. Brethren, the Scriptures are the Source of all God’s promises. If you want to know what God has promised you, then you need to crack open His Word every day, and read it!

Now, just what are these “**great and precious**” promises? That’s a loaded question! There are *thousands* of promises in this Book. If I were to preach on every single promise that God gave to His people from Genesis to Revelation, a lifetime would not suffice to cover it all! (And we don’t have that long!) So, this morning, I would like to take a sampling of *some* of these “great and precious promises.” To that end, let us turn to **Ephesians 1**. There are *lots* of promises in this passage!

Read Ephesians 1:3-14.

In these verses, Paul mentions several wonderful promises that God has given to His children. Let's examine them. First of all, we find that **Christians have been given “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.”** (Read verse 3 again.)

Christian, on the day when Christ arose from the dead, the purchase of your salvation was complete: and all the spiritual blessings that *come with* salvation were purchased along with it! Because Christ paid the complete price for your sins on the cross, and conquered death, and is now seated in heaven and interceding for you before the Father, you have been given *all* spiritual blessings! Let's look at some other Scriptures, and see what some of these blessings are.

Read 1 Peter 1:3-5.

Read Ephesians 4:7-8.

What are the spiritual treasures that we have been given? Well, for one thing, Peter says that we have been given **“an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven”** for us. Paul says that because Christ has conquered death, and has led **“captivity captive,”** He is now able to give spiritual gifts to men. In **Galatians 5:22-23**, we are given a list of nine of these spiritual gifts. **“Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,”** and **“temperance”** are just a few of the “spiritual blessings” that God has in store for Christians. You cannot buy these treasures with any amount of money. They are spiritual treasures, which only God can give.

Yet, *where* are these spiritual blessings? We can't touch them with our hands, or see them with our eyes; so how do we access them? Well, remember what Paul said? He said that they are **“in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.”** *And where are you, if you are a true child of God?* You are **“in Him.”** This means that if you are saved, then you are right there *in* the “heavenly bank” of Jesus Christ! All you need to do to withdraw these spiritual riches is *to ask* Christ for them, in faith! How's *that* for a promise? **James 1:5** says, **“If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”**

Now, what other promises has God given us? God promises that **those who are saved have received “the adoption of children.”** (Read Ephesians 1:5 again.)

What does it mean to receive the **“adoption of children”**? In our modern world, “adoption” means “taking a child that isn't biologically yours into your home, and rearing him as your child”; but in the first century Roman world, to be “adopted” meant “to receive your father's inheritance.” You see, in a Roman household, a young man was considered to be no different from a servant while he was still a minor. But then, when he was of age, his father took him to the civil authorities and declared him to be the legal heir of his inheritance. His son then had all the privileges of an heir. He now had access to his father's wealth and inheritance.

What, then, does it mean to be “adopted” as God's child? It means that the moment you were born again into God's family, you were declared to be the heir of all the spiritual riches that God has for you. This is your status *right now, in this lifetime*. Do you realise what this means, brethren? That means that your salvation is not hanging in the balance. Your access to

your spiritual inheritance is secure, because your status as a son of God is secure. How's *that* for a promise? Let's see what Paul said about this in **Galatians 4**.

Read Galatians 4:1-7.

If you know Christ as your Saviour, then you are "***adopted.***" You are an heir with the Father, and a joint-heir with the Son! Yet, that is not all. Paul also says that **Christians have been "*accepted in the beloved.*"** (Read **Ephesians 1:6** again.)

Who is "***the beloved***" one, for whose sake Christians are accepted? It is Jesus Christ! Because Christians have been placed "in" the Son, they are now accepted by the Father. It isn't because Christians are *worthy* of salvation that they have been accepted; rather, they have been accepted because of what Christ did for them on the cross.

How can God look down on rotten sinners like us, and forgive us of all our trespasses, and call us "***accepted***" (even though He knows that we will continue to sin against Him, and grieve Him, even after our salvation)? It is all because of the "riches of His grace." It is by the undeserved favour of God. The Father says to those who are in Christ, "You don't *deserve* my acceptance; but I have accepted you, because you repented of your sin and received *my beloved Son.*" That is a *great* promise!

What other promises have Christians been given? Let's go back to **Ephesians 1:7**, and see. (Read **Ephesians 1:7.**) According to this verse, **Christians have received the promise of redemption, and the forgiveness of sins.**

Now, "redemption" is not a word that people use much these days; and of those who *do* talk about some kind of "redemption" experience in their lives, most of them have a false understanding of what it means. To most people, "redemption" means that "*I have bought my life back through my own cleaning-up effort. I have turned over a new leaf. I have redeemed myself through my own personal reformation.*" My friend, if this is what comes to your mind when you think of "redemption," then you are sorely mistaken. In fact, you are not saved! The Bible says, "***For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast***" (**Ephesians 2:8-9**).

If your life could be bought back by your efforts to be a better person, it would mean that *you* redeemed your soul. However, the Bible makes it clear that you *cannot* redeem your soul. Christ is the *only* One who can redeem your soul from the bondage and penalty of sin. He already did the work of redemption 2,000 years ago! When He shed His blood, He made the purchase of your soul. If you have stopped trusting in your own "goodness," and have placed your faith in Christ instead, then you have submitted to that purchase, and have allowed Christ to take His rightful possession of your life. *Christ has* bought us with His own blood. *He* paid the full price for our sins. In God's sight, all our sins are forgiven! If you are saved, you are no longer under condemnation. *That* is a wonderful promise! The Bible says, "***There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus***" (**Romans 8:1**).

What other great and precious promises have we been given? According to Paul, **we who are saved have access to all the wisdom and prudence that we need.** (Read **Ephesians 1:8-9** again.) Think of this, Christian! Christ has *abounded* toward you with *all* wisdom and

prudence. That word “abounded” means that this wisdom goes “over and above.” It goes far beyond what we could possibly need. God doesn’t skimp on wisdom! He’s given you the Word of God, and He’s given you the Spirit of God to help you discern the Scriptures. All this is possible because you have been placed in Jesus Christ!

Read 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, 30.

According to these verses, Jesus Christ is *“the wisdom of God.”* All God’s wisdom is found in Him. This means that if you are saved, you have access to all the wisdom that you need to live your life. Why? Because all God’s wisdom is in Him; and *you are “in him.”* Are you accessing that wisdom by faith, Christian? Or are you often falling back on your own wisdom, and making decisions based on sight instead of faith? If you have *not* been living by God’s wisdom, you have no excuse for failing to do so. According to **verse 9**, Christians have been given the ability to discern the *“mystery of His will.”* What is the mystery of his will? It is the knowledge of God’s purpose for you. It is the knowledge of everything from your salvation, to your sanctification, to your future glorification in heaven, and everything in between. Everything that you need to know about God’s will for your life, and about your destiny, Christ has revealed to you. You have the direct commands of Scripture. You have the principles of Scripture, by which you can discern God’s will in specific situations. You have the Holy Spirit to reveal the meaning of Scripture to you. You also have the privilege of being able to go to God’s throne room in prayer at any time, and to *ask* God for direction.

Brethren, you and I have no excuse for not knowing and living by the wisdom of God. We won’t be able to stand before God at the Judgment Seat and say, “I’m sorry I disobeyed you in this area of my life, God; but I just couldn’t figure out what you wanted me to do.” God has abounded to you with *all* wisdom and prudence, for every area of your life—whether it be in your marriage, in your family, in your work, in your studies, in your finances, in your obligations to the Lord, in your church commitments, in your witness, in your inward struggles with fear, temptation, and anger, or in whatever other problems you may be dealing with in your life!

Now, there is one more promise that Paul mentions here in **Ephesians 1**. **Christians have been given wonderful promises for the future. (Read Ephesians 1:10-11 again.)**

In **verse 10**, Paul says *“That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth; even in him.”* In other words, when all the ages of human history are completed, and God has finished His plan for mankind, a new *“dispensation”* (literally, a new “house arrangement”) will begin. It will be an eternal age, in which all believers from all “house arrangements” of history will be gathered together into *God’s House!* It will be the long-awaited time that John saw in his vision.

Read Revelation 21:1-7.

These words seem so dreamy, and so distant from the world of time and space in which we live, that many Christians don’t think much about this promise. *But we should!* Not only has God gone to the trouble to describe His beautiful heavenly home, but He has told us what events to expect between now and that future day. It’s all in His Word, the Bible!

We who are saved have been given an inheritance, folks! This “inheritance” includes everything in the salvation package. In this life, we have all the wisdom and power that we need to live our lives for God. We have the promise of ruling and reigning with Christ as kings and priests on the earth during the future 1,000-year Kingdom of Christ. We have the promise of walking on streets of gold, and of receiving rewards for our service to God on earth, and of casting them at His feet. And until that day, we have the most comforting promise of all. **(Read Ephesians 1:12-14 again.)**

This is the greatest promise of all, Christian. Until the “day of redemption”—until the Resurrection Day, when we will receive sinless, glorified bodies—we are “sealed” with the Holy Spirit; and that seal cannot be broken. The Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence in our bodies is the “*earnest*,” or “proof,” that God will one day fulfil all the promises of salvation, and give us resurrected bodies like His own. That means that you cannot lose your salvation! That is a promise; and God never breaks His promises.

God has given you many “*great and precious promises*,” Christian; and they are all found in His Word, the Bible. Are you reading it daily?

II. The purpose of God’s promises: Godliness

(Read verse 4 again.) We now come to the *purpose* of all these promises. Why has God given us all these promises in His Word? Peter gives two reasons for it.

First of all, Peter says that God has given us all these promises so that we “*might be partakers of the divine nature*.” Now, what does this mean? In what sense are Christians made “*partakers of the divine nature*”? Does this mean that when we become Christians, we become “gods,” or that we are made “part of God” in some way? If you listen to the so-called “pastors” on the God Channel, that is *exactly* what many of them will tell you. Take Kenneth Copeland, for example. He is on record, time and time again, as saying that Christians are “gods.” In one T.V. broadcast, Copeland said, “He [Christ] imparted in you when you were born again—Peter said it just as plain, he said, ‘We are partakers of the divine nature.’...And that [nature] was imparted, injected into your spirit man....You don’t *have* a god in you. You *are* one.”¹

According to Copeland, Christians have been restored to the “god class.” In Copeland’s perverse theology, Adam was a god before he sinned; but when he sinned, he lost his godhood. That, according to Copeland, is why Christ died for our sins: He died in order to “restore” us to the god class. Copeland also once said, “I say this with all respect, so that I don’t upset you too bad. But I say it anyway: When I read in the Bible where He [God] says, ‘I am,’ I just smile and say, ‘Yes, I am, too.’”² By the way, this “we are little gods” doctrine has also been taught by Benny Hinn, Paul Crouch, Joyce Meyers, and many others who have appeared on the God Channel over the years. It is currently being pushed in a big way by Bill and Benny Johnson of Bethel Church in California, and by other leaders of the Word Faith and New Apostolic Reformation movement. But what does the Bible say about this?

¹ Kenneth Copeland, “The Force of Love” (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, n.d.), cassette tape #02-0028.

² Kenneth Copeland, “The Believer’s Voice of Victory” broadcast, July 9, 1987.

Read Genesis 3:1-7.

The Bible says just the opposite of what the liars on the God Channel say. Adam did not lose “god” status when he sinned against God. He never *was* a god. To the contrary, Adam and Eve’s sin was that they believed Satan’s lie that they *could* become gods! Adam acted upon this foolish belief when he ate the forbidden fruit! The so-called “Christians” in the Word Faith movement who teach this “little gods” theology have bought into the same old lie that Satan has been telling people for thousands of years. We are *not* gods; nor will we ever become gods, or become part of “God.” We are nothing but men, who are created in an image *like* God’s image. As men, we are nothing but created beings; and as Christians, we are nothing but sinners saved by the grace of God.

So, this brings us back to the question: “What *does* Peter mean when he says that Christians have been made ‘*partakers of the divine nature*’”? Well, let’s compare Scripture with Scripture.

Read 1 Peter 1:15-16.

Read Hebrews 12:7-11.

To be a “partaker of the divine nature” means to imitate the *holy* part of God’s nature. It means “to share in His righteous character.” God saved us so that the power of sin might be broken in our lives. He saved us so that we might be able to live *holy* lives, just as He is holy. We will never possess the attributes that belong uniquely to God. We will never be omnipotent, omnipresent, or omniscient. We will never be able to create things from nothing. We will never be sovereign, or immutable, or transcendent. However, we can be *like* Christ, in that we can live holy lives, by His power and enablement. We also can possess the measure of *wisdom* that we need in order to live a life of service to Him. It’s all available for the asking, Christian. Jesus is to us “*wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*”

Now, according to this verse, there is one more reason why God has given us all these “*great and precious promises*” in His Word. We have been given these promises so that we might escape “*the corruption that is in the world through lust.*”

Brethren, we live in a filthy, fallen world. Lusts of every kind abound all around us. Every single day, filthy things on the telly, on the internet, on the magazine racks, and on the billboards try to capture our eyes. Every day, we hear ungodly talk from people all around us. Every day we are tempted to go back to the covetous, self-indulgent, lying, deceitful, prideful, hypocritical, idolatrous way of life that we lived before we were saved. Make no mistake about it: the pull of the flesh is *strong*. The fiery darts that Satan’s minions hurl at us are quick and destructive. But in Christ, we have the ability to overcome these lusts. In Christ, we have the power to please God. God has *promised* us so. **Ephesians 6:10-11** says, “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*” **First John 4:4** says, “*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.*” This is a “great and precious promise”; and God *always* keeps His promises!

Conclusion: There is a song that the choir at my home church used to sing: and its chorus goes like this: “You’ve listened to a thousand sermons, but you’ve never really heard; and the only way your life will change is to get into God’s Word. You can try to walk on water, but you’ll never get too far. You can’t stand on promises if you don’t know what they are.” Christian, are you standing steadfast upon the promises of God’s Word? Or are you failing to cling to God’s promises because you don’t know what they are (or, because you *do* know what they are, but you don’t fully *believe* that God can come through on these promises)? Are you living largely by sight, and not by faith? If so, ask the Lord to forgive you of your unbelief; and ask Him to give you the power that you need to live for Him. He *will* answer your prayer! As we close this morning, I would also ask: “Are you really saved?” None of the promises that we’ve talked about this morning are relevant to you until they repent of your sin and trust in Christ to save you. He who takes the Son, takes all! All the promises of God are in Him!