

Promises, part 1
April 13, 2014

In the year 2000 something odd appeared in stores in the US and England. People actually bought it. What they bought looked like the packaging for an action figure doll. It was a piece of cardboard, with a hole in the center in the shape of a human figure, with a plastic bubble over it. This was the Invisible Jim action figure.

You can't break him. You can't lose him. And when they call him invisible, they really mean it — you can't see him. That's because, strictly speaking, Invisible Jim doesn't exist. There was no toy in the package. There was never meant to be a toy in the package.

It was a gag gift. Most people got the gag. But every month or so the company would get a phone call from someone who said their toy wasn't in the package.

It cost the company ten cents to make each one. They sold in the US for \$2.50. And business was brisk. When the story started making headlines, Jim had been on the shelves for about a year. But even so, no one had seen him.

Every product makes claims for itself on the packaging. This was one case where the promises on the packaging were kept. We live on promises. We do, we live on promises. We work our jobs each week based on the promise that we will get paid. Many of you have quit your jobs based on a promise that you will get retirement and Social Security checks.

We who are married, got that way because of promises we made to someone else who made promises to us. Everyday we make decisions based on promises that other people make. Witnesses in a court room promise to tell the truth. Politicians promise to make changes. Businesses promise all kinds of things.

Our Christian faith also relies on promises. It relies on promises made to us by God. Today we start a series of sermons about some of the promises God has made to us and how we should live because of those promises. Today we going to start by looking at the benefits of living God's promises.

2 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV) His (Jesus) 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. 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.

This short passage is packed with spiritual truth. Let me unpack it for you a bit at a time. First we see that Christ's divine power has provided everything believers need in order to live for God. Say that with me.

2 Peter 1:3a (NIV) His divine power has given us everything we need for life...

We can speak of three different kinds of life. One is the physical life that every person on the planet lives. The second is the spiritual life that Christians are enabled to live by their faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit of God comes to live inside you to make this spiritual life possible. And the third life is the life Christians will live in heaven. So which one is he speaking of here?

He is not speaking of physical life that everyone lives. You were living physical life before you became a follower of Jesus Christ. Physical life depends on air, water, and food. You don't have to know about God in order to live physical life. You don't have to be a Christian to live physical life. He is not writing about physical life.

He could mean eternal life, in heaven. But I don't believe he is. I believe he is speaking of the Christians spiritual life on earth. And this is why.

2 Peter 1:3a (NIV) His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness...

The word "godliness" refers to living out God's will. It is connected to the idea of piety, a living focus on God. This does not refer to heaven. We won't need help in living out God's will in heaven. We need help living God's will now, on earth. He is writing of the Christian life, the spiritual life, that we are trying to live now.

We need help in learning what God's will is and then we need help in living it out.. This is exactly what we have in Jesus. "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness."

Let's unpack three points about what He has given us.

1) He has given this to all of us.

What is He writing of? Does he mean only the apostles? No. There wouldn't be any reason for him to write this to those who were not apostles. Nor does he mean just elders, or just deacons, or just men, or just adults. He is writing to Christians. This truth takes in all Christians, of both genders, of every age, of any place in God's church.

2) He has given all that we need.

Everything you need has already been given. It is already available. It is available to every Christian.

Perhaps you have seen the commercial for the newest credit card. You can get cash back on everything you purchase. There are no restrictions. Some cards advertise as giving you cash back on every purchase. But then there are restrictions as to what they mean by "every purchase". You have to buy at certain stores, or what you get is limited to certain months, or you have to sign up for some savings each quarter. But this card has no restrictions. You get 1.5% cash back on every purchase, everywhere, everyday. And then the actor says. "That's what everything ought to mean."

Well with Jesus everything means everything. You have everything you need for life and godliness. Do you need spiritual truth? It is all in the Bible. Do you need understanding of that truth? You have the Holy Spirit in you to give you the understanding. Do you

need courage to live upon that truth? The Holy Spirit will give you that too. You may need something that I don't need. And what I need you may not need. But whatever any of us need for life and godliness, it is already available to us. Whatever it is you need today in order to live out God's will, you already have it in Jesus Christ.

3) These resources will be enough to meet our need.

Since these resources come from Jesus they will be enough to meet your need. They come by His power. This is the same power God used to raise Jesus from the dead. This is the same power that Jesus used in creating the world. This is the same power that God uses to accomplish all of His plans. It is THIS power by which you will be helped to live life and godliness.

So don't say to yourself, "I'm too new a Christian." Don't say to yourself, "I'm too spiritually immature." Don't say to yourself, "I am not a leader." Don't say to yourself, "I am not yet at the stage that I can know and do God's will." If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, "His divine power has given (you) everything (you) need for life and godliness..."

You may distance yourself from these resources through sin. You may fail to partake of these resources through prayer and submission. But don't make the excuse that you do not have all that you need for life and godliness.

Now let's move on to the next part of the passage.

2 Peter 1:3-4a (NIV) His (Jesus) 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. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises....

There are wonderful things that Jesus has promised every Christian. This series of sermons is about these promises. We're going to look at just five of these promises over the coming weeks. There are others, and as you read through your Bible each day, I urge you to look for them and make a list of them. Look at what Peter writes about the promises.

2 Peter 1:4b (NIV) ... through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

What does he mean by participate in the divine nature? Let me tell you first what it does NOT mean.

⊗ **Peter is not saying that we become gods.** There are some religions on earth that teach that men can become gods. They teach that mankind can, through various kind deeds and religious actions, become a god himself. Christianity does not teach this. Peter is not saying that we become gods.

⊗ **Peter is not saying that we merge into God.** Some religions teach that the human soul is merged with the universe after death. Such directions of thought disagree with Christian teaching. After death we will meet Jesus face to face, but we will not become Him or merge into Him or lose ourselves in Him.

What Peter means by this unique phrasing is that we participate in the character of God. We see the character of God lived out perfectly in Jesus Christ. God's love, goodness, faithfulness, mercy, and much more we see in Jesus. It is these same qualities of character that God is working to develop in us. It is accomplished for us by the Holy Spirit.

This is connected in our passage with escaping the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. Only people who had the character of Christ Jesus would be able to escape this corruption. Such corruption causes us to sin each day. But the Holy Spirit is working to transform us, to erase the evil desires in us, and replace them with godly desires.

Benjamin Franklin, in his autobiography tells a true story that came to him from his neighbor, who was a blacksmith. This takes place in the days before electricity. To sharpen metal tools, they used a stone wheel that was turned with a crank by one person while another person held the ax, knife, or tool against the face of the stone as it turned. The stone would sand off some of the metal to sharpen it.

Ben says that a man brought an ax to his neighbor and wanted it sharpened, but also wanted the whole surface of the ax sanded so it would shine like the sharpened part. Quoting Ben now, "The smith consented to grind it bright for him if he would turn the wheel; he turned, while the smith pressed the broad face of the ax hard and heavily on the stone, which made the turning of it (the wheel) very fatiguing. The man came every now and then from the wheel to see how the work went on, and at length would take his ax as it was, without farther grinding. "No," said the smith, "turn on, turn on; we shall have it bright by-and-by; as yet, it is only speckled." "Yes," said the man, "but I think I like a speckled ax best."

Mr. Franklin tells this story in relation to himself. He had set out upon a goal of reaching perfection in his character. But the more he tried to achieve it, the harder it became to accomplish. So finally he decided he could live with some imperfections in himself.

Ben found out what we all learn sooner or later. No person is able to become perfect by our own effort. The only perfect person was Jesus. We need help to become like Him. That help is available to us through Jesus.

The help we need is available through Jesus. Believe it. Pray it. Live it.

This is where he points us in his letter. He wants us to believe the promises of God and so to depend on them.

2 Peter 1:5-7 (NIV) For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

As you believe the promises of God, pray for help to add these qualities to your character, and then attempt to live like this, God will make it happen in you. God will form His character in you and change your desires so from evil to godly.

This too is a promise of God. Put your faith in His promise today. Christian faith is not a blind faith. Christian faith is always a belief in God's promise because God is the one making those promises.

Who do you trust most in the world? Maybe it is your parent. Maybe it is your child. Maybe it is your best friend. Maybe it is your spouse. Maybe it is your boss. If the person you most trust made you a promise that was fully in his or her power to do, wouldn't you believe it? Sure you would. You would believe the promise because of who made it.

That is why we believe the promises of God to us. Because God makes them. God is fully powerful enough and wise enough to make only promises that He can keep. You can depend on God to keep His promises to us.

Believe it. Pray it. Live it.

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Invitation

If you watch sports on TV you have probably seen someone holding up a banner that says, "**John 3:16**". I don't often watch sports on TV and yet I have seen people hold up these banners and the cameras show it. John 3:16 is one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. It has a promise. It promises eternal life to anyone who puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

That is a promise from God. And because of that promise we give you opportunity this morning to personally respond to God who makes you that promise. If you will believe that Jesus died for all of your sins, receiving Jesus as Savior and turning your life over to Him as Lord, God will forgive all of your sins and give you eternal life.