

You have the power, so make every effort

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[0 : 00] I want to start with a question for Jane and Emma, although Emma's not back yet. It's okay. Mom can tell her what the question is later on. But the rest of you can think of the answer as well.

And it's at the top of the outline. The question is, what would you do if you had all the power in the world? What would you do if you had all the power in the world? Actually, why don't we just turn to the person next to you or behind you.

Give you 30 seconds to a minute. Just have a chat. What would your answer be? Okay. I wouldn't ask anyone to shout out your answers from the congregation.

But I wonder how many of you went down the X-Men route? Or the Marvel's Heroes or Master of the Universe? Anyone? No?

Amazing powers to do impossible things? Not. Okay. I thought you young people liked those kind of things. Or maybe you're just like me, right? Just wanting power to make your life easier.

[1 : 02] Like knowing your subject inside out so you don't have to study. Or having the power never to fall off a bike. For those of you who know, I've now infamously fall off my bike during lockdown.

I had to land it up in the Alfred. Or perhaps something a bit more serious. Being able to resolve conflict. That's good, isn't it? Just by smiling at someone.

Such power is really attractive, isn't it? Well, in our passage today, the Bible says that we do have power.

All Christians, the Bible promises, have amazing power for their lives. And it's right there in verse 3. Actually, the Apostle Peter says, His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life 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, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

[2 : 12] And that almost sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? Divine power. That means God's power for everything we need for a godly life.

Ah, that's the catch, isn't it? It's only what we need for a godly life. It's not for satisfying our wants and desires or for making life easy.

In fact, it's the opposite. It's power to say no to evil desires. Or in Peter's words, escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Now, at first, this sort of power doesn't seem very attractive or useful. Except when you think a little more, so much of the heartache that we have in life comes because we're not able to say no to evil desires.

Now, how often has it been, for instance, when we've fallen into temptation, we know that's something we shouldn't do and yet we do it. And then we spend so much time afterwards regretting.

[3 : 23] A lot of fear. And then we've got ourselves in a mess because of it, which we then try so hard to undo, only to dig ourselves further into the hole that we've created.

I don't mean to pick on Jane or Emma, but some of what they shared today were these things, weren't they? Sometimes we call them our inner demons that we have to fight, whether it's to shake off doubt or anxiety or confusion about who we are or what we're to do in life.

Well, God has given us his great and precious promise of his power to escape the world's corruption and instead to lead a godly life.

He does this, Peter says in verse 4, by enabling us to participate in his divine nature. Now, to participate doesn't mean that you become divine or godlike, but rather, Peter's saying is, what he's saying is that we have God's character.

We are to become Christlike. And so God's power is given to us to grow in his character, which then allows us to lead a godly life, just like his son Jesus.

[4 : 43] But it's conditional on knowing him. For, Peter says, it only occurs through our knowledge of him who called us by his glory and goodness.

Now, who is this him that's referred to here? Well, obviously, it's God. But if you read the first two verses again, you'll see it's actually God through his son Jesus.

For the letter begins like this, 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.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. What's implied here is that we only know God when we know Jesus Christ as Lord.

And this knowledge isn't intellectual knowledge, but relational knowledge. It's the difference between saying that you know the queen and you know your mother, unless you're Prince Charles, of course.

[5 : 54] To know your mother is a statement of relationship with her, isn't it? And with Jesus, this relationship comes as a result of faith in him, faith made possible by the righteousness of Jesus our God, of Jesus our God and Savior.

All of this is really just a very succinct summary of the gospel, which Jane and Emma have actually explained to us in their testimony.

Jesus' righteousness is fulfilled in his death on the cross for us. And this righteousness is made available to us by faith in him, which means our sins are forgiven and our relationship with God is restored.

And that's why Jane and Emma have professed their faith in Jesus today. That's what baptism symbolizes, the washing away or the forgiveness of sin.

And once that condition is fulfilled, we have the gift of God's power given to us, all of us, to live this godly life free from the corruption of the world.

[7 : 01] And it's a promise that we have everything we need now, given to us now, not in the future. Despite the fact that we are still sinners, i.e. still do wrong things, we have the power to lead a godly life.

And I have to say that if I put that question to you, many times as Christians, it doesn't seem like we do, do we? We love not to give in to temptation, to say and do the right things all the time.

And yet, we often feel so weak, don't we? The struggle is real. Well, think of God's power, this power that's given to us, like slow-release fertilizer or low-GI bread, where all the goodness for you or the plant takes time to be released.

It's the same with God's power. We have it, and yet, as we read on now, we're taught to grow in it, to make every effort to add to our faith, this godliness.

So we read in verse 5, for this very reason, that is, for this reason that you have the power, make every effort to add to your faith, goodness and to goodness, knowledge and to knowledge, self-control and to self-control, perseverance, perseverance, godliness, godliness, mutual affection, and to mutual affection, love.

[8 : 26] For if you possess these qualities increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

So again, the essential starting point, Peter says, is faith, faith in Jesus. But to that, it's added all these other aspects of godly character.

Goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, love. And it may seem like Peter's talking about, these are like qualities, like, you know, levels, like when you play a computer game, you have to get from one to the other after you've passed one.

But actually, it's not. Because there are simply different ways of demonstrating our faith. They arise out of our knowledge and faith in Jesus and all of them continue increasing in measure as we grow. It's sort of similar to, for example, playing tennis or learning to play it well. The basic action of tennis is quite simple, isn't it? It's to hit the ball with the racket, right?

[9 : 40] The thing is that you have to hit the ball on the sweet spot, isn't it? You don't frame it or whatever. But it's, all shots are about that, right? Getting the ball to hit the sweet spot.

But beyond that, you know, you aim to master all sorts of different strokes, don't you? There's the backhand, then the forehand, the serve, the volley, the overhead smash. You can do a topspin or you can do the slice. I mean, I can't do any of those, but, you know, you try to. But all basically off the one shot, one, you know, ball on to the racket, isn't it? And likewise, the godly life is always one lived out of faith. So faith is that basic shot, if you like. But then the shot or the faith in certain situations calls for self-control. At other times, it's perseverance or mutual affection. Depending on the situation, you exercise some of these different other qualities. But whatever it is, God's power is given to us in that situation to display the appropriate quality.

[10 : 48] And the more we do it, the more these qualities increase so that we take on God's holy character or divine nature. And so even though God gives the power, we are to make every effort to apply it.

Just like you may have the raw talent for tennis, you know, great hand-eye coordination or reflex. But then you need to train and practice, right? So you can play like Roger. So if you're a new Christian and you feel powerless, don't be discouraged. This is slow-release power that God has given to you. Keep making every effort to know Jesus, to know the Word of God, and make every effort to add to your faith as you study His Word and know what He asks of you to add to your faith all these godly qualities. And then over time, and by which I mean years and decades, not weeks, you increase in these qualities. And you begin to see your life becoming effective and productive. You may not always get it right, but you'll start getting it right more of the time than not. And that should encourage you to keep going as you see that happening.

[12 : 10] Because the alternative, Peter says, is for you to go backwards, to return back to your past way of life. You see, my guess is that it's often dissatisfaction or despair with life that causes us to seek out Jesus in the first place.

Both Jane and Emma have sort of shared that as well. We're sick of our own sin, we realize we're helpless, that prompts us to turn to God and cry out to Him for help. And so we start as a Christian with great enthusiasm when we find that God is going to be able to meet our needs in that area. But then we start facing challenges to leading a godly life. You know, we think, this is actually taking more effort than I thought. Now what's going on? Am I not getting it? Am I a failure? Where's God in all of this? And then we start thinking, maybe it's not worth it. We may, maybe we should give up. Well, Peter sort of slaps us around the head figuratively. Don't be so nearsighted or blind, he says.

[13 : 13] Have you forgotten where you started? Don't you remember that your past sins and you wanted to get away from it? Why then are you going back to that again? Don't.

Keep moving forward, Peter says, even though it's hard. It's like, a bit like sitting in a push cart. Remember when you were small and you had one of these? Yes? Yeah. Imagine you're at the top of a hill and I've got a little, yeah. And what you need to do is push yourself, right, over the top of the hill and then you know that you're going to start rolling down because gravity will take you down there. But you know that if you don't push hard enough, right, then what's going to happen is that you're going to roll back to the start. And that's sort of a bit like the Christian life, isn't it? We want to make every effort to get over the hill. That's why Peter reiterates again in verse 10, therefore, my brothers, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[14 : 21] What Jesus has done for us on the cross is all we need to receive this welcome into the eternal kingdom. We just need to get to the bottom of the hill. But the journey down to the bottom is not a straight downhill slope.

Sometimes it's bumpy, sometimes it goes uphill again, like, you know, as I've got on the slide. And so we need to still make every effort along the way to keep the momentum up, as it were, keep the steering straight, even when it gets a bit bumpy. Now, when I say we have to make the effort, don't think that we're the ones with the power to push up the hill, right? Because we've already read it's God's power through Christ dying on the cross for

us.

That's the power that we're given to lead the godly life, that gives us what we need to get over each hump and bump. And you may imagine that actually God is, you know, God is like the parents standing behind that push cart, giving you the shove you need.

But actually, a better way of thinking of it is that actually God is the one in the cart with us. You know, we may be thinking that we're frantically peddling like toddlers to try and get up, but actually God is the one in there, in the cart with us.

[15 : 40] And it's His Spirit given to us that's at work. And what He does is He's almost giving us the muscles in our feet.

That's the power that comes. So, it may look like toddlers' feet, but actually it's got God's power in it. And that's the thing that helps us to keep going.

But the thing is that it's never that God is active and we're passive. The way the Christian life works is that God is active while we make the effort.

So, it means that we have to make the effort to discipline ourselves, to do the right thing, to study God's Word, to know right from wrong, to be humble, to repent and make things right and say sorry by going the extra mile to love our brother or sister even when we don't feel like it.

But when we make an effort to do these things, God's Spirit then strengthens us in our efforts. So, if you like, the more effort we make, the more God is at work.

[16 : 48] But it's still God's power at work. Does that make sense? And the more consistent and habitual we are, the more it becomes part of our character. Or put it in the language of verse 4, we participate in the divine nature.

And then we become like that tree that's described in Psalm 1 which Amanda read, planted by the stream. The stream is God's law as we see in verse 2.

As we delight in the law and meditate on it, we are like the tree feeding on the streams of living water. And then we grow into a mature tree yielding its fruit in its season.

And what is this fruit? Well, it's all those qualities that Peter talks about in the passage that we have been looking at. Goodness, self-control, perseverance, love, and so on.

And just like a sturdy tree, doesn't wither whatever the season. So Peter says that if we have these things, we will not stumble.

[17 : 49] It doesn't mean we're perfect. It shouldn't result in pride as if to think, oh, I'm not going to stumble because that's ungodly, isn't it? But it actually gives us an assurance, a quiet confidence that actually God is doing His thing in us so that when we get to the very end, we will receive a rich welcome in Christ's eternal kingdom.

And so friends, if you're here today and you're not a Christian, then let me invite you to commit to this journey. You see, so often we are looking in from the outside and thinking the Christian faith is just all about making this effort.

It's just too hard. You know, it's all about can't do this, can't do that, need to be perfect and then maybe God will welcome us into His kingdom. Well, that's not Christianity. That's legalism which the Bible rejects.

Instead, to be a Christian is to first put your faith in Jesus which is itself a gift from God and then you have all this power that God gives you to lead a godly life.

And so if you're sick of the conflict or the internal demons in your life, then God will give you, once you put your trust in Jesus, this slow release power to help you live a godly life.

[19 : 11] And that's a wonderful thing to have, isn't it? And for those of us who have this power through Jesus, then let me encourage you to make every effort to add to your faith all these God-given qualities.

They are the very same ones that Jesus has. The thing with the Christian life is never to stagnate. to keep increasing in Christ-likeness.

And it doesn't matter whether you're a new Christian or you're someone who's been a Christian for decades, there's always more of Jesus that you can become, isn't it? As John Chapman says in the book which I'm about to give to both Jane and Emma, it's called A Sinner's Guide to Holiness.

I've got a picture of it there. I give it to all people who get baptized, including Jane and Emma. John Chapman, who's gone to glory by the way, he's passed away a few years ago.

This quote is on there, Becoming holy is a vital, worthwhile goal even though the first 60 years may be the hardest. So most of you are not 60 yet. Some are and may have already got there.

[20 : 17] But of course what John would probably also say is that as the years go by and when you see the holiness bearing fruit in your life, you also come to, in one sense, enjoy the effort, enjoy the hard work.

Yes, it's hard work still, but actually you go, this is satisfying hard work because you know and you can see the rich welcome, the glory of the rich eternal kingdom that is drawing near as you do.

So let me encourage you to get on this journey, to make every effort so that when you get to the end, you see the glory of that eternal kingdom. Let's pray.

Father, thank you that you've given us, given all those who know you the divine power for all we need to lead a godly life. Thank you that this is true for Jane and Emma.

Thank you that you have called us and chosen us to inherit your eternal kingdom. Help us to make every effort to confirm our calling and election by putting on the virtues of goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection, and love.

[21 : 28] In the name of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.