

New Power

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[0:00] Not everyone in this room will be in the kingdom of God. Not everyone in this room will be in the kingdom of God.

These were the words spoken in my very first Doctrine 101 lecture at Moore College. The then principal, Peter Jensen, who went on to become the 11th Archbishop of Sydney, was speaking from what he had observed in his years of ministry.

Students going on to full-time ministry and somewhere down the track, falling away for some reason or another. Now we can't actually make that call. Who will and won't be in the kingdom of God? That's God's call. And we know God is gracious and sovereign, and to those he has called, there's no losing our salvation. Objectively, we are saved.

But subjectively, as we will see today, we need to be all the more eager to make our calling and election sure. If not everyone in this room will be in the kingdom of God didn't rattle you, I found what the principal said unsettling, and all these years later, I still remember what he said word for word.

[1:14] At the time, all the first years looked around at each other, and it was a bit of a, oh, moment, like, wonder who it could be, sort of thing. Now since I've left college, seven people I know that were in vocational ministry have been struck off because of some moral failure.

It was porn addiction, domestic violence, adultery, and one person even left their wife for a man. Will these people be in the kingdom of God?

Certainly, whatever they have done, or whatever we do for that matter, we can experience God's grace and forgiveness. But the damage had been done. Ruin marriages, families in tatters, congregations rocked, and a trail of hurt.

Ministries dissolved, and that verse 8 there that we read just a moment ago, that reds are red, ineffective and unproductive. The Christian psychologist Arch Hart visited Sydney some years ago, and he ran a conference for pastors on finishing well.

You know, run the race in such a way as to win the prize, from 1 Corinthians 9.24. And Steve touched on this on Thursday night at Heartbeat, and we're reminded at Heartbeat that the prize is people who you've shared the gospel with, who will then share an eternal life with Christ together.

[2:40] Run the race, finish well. And the stats that he had from a national church survey conducted across pastors in the US weren't pretty. And he was warning us that this sort of thing's coming to Australia, just because of the way society is changing.

And this is some years ago now, so the stats will have changed, but this is what I've got. 45% of pastors say that they have experienced depression or burnout to the extent that they need to take a leave of absence from ministry.

52% of pastors say they and their spouses believe that being in pastoral ministry is hazardous to their family's well-being and health. 56% of pastors' wives say that they have no close friends.

70% of pastors don't have any close friends. 75% report severe stress, causing anguish, worry, bewilderment, anger, depression, fear, and alienation.

80% of pastors say they have insufficient time with their spouse. 80% believe their pastoral ministry affects their families negatively. 90% work more than 50 hours.

[3:48] 94% feel under pressure to have a perfect family. And I can't remember this stat exactly, but remember there's 330 million people in America.

I feel like he said 1,500 pastors leave their ministry each month due to burnout, conflict, or moral failure, but it could have been each year. But it's still a lot, right?

And that's the vocational ministry. But all those things, you could say, well, I'm experiencing any of those things. See, ministry is tough and it's hard, and Jesus never said it would be easy. In fact,

he's made it very clear we're going to be treated the same way he was treated.

Now, that's pastors in vocational ministry. But the fact is, we are all called into ministry of the gospel in our lives. We've all got this call. We're all called to share the gospel in life and word and deed, whatever our vocation.

We're all called to make disciples. We're all called to be salt and light in the world. No matter what our vocation, we're all called into ministry. And that's hard.

[4:53] And that's tough. We need to know what it takes to go the distance and finish well. Don't believe the myth, it won't happen to me. Moral and ministry failure can happen to any of us, and happens all the time.

Who's made an idle, inappropriate comment at work, or laughed at the wrong joke, or been a poor witness of the gospel somehow? The passage we're focusing on reminds us how to be equipped to go the distance with new power.

Let's follow along with the St. Paul's app or on the screen. Three things. God has given us all we need to be spiritually mature. Verses 3 and 4. We must actively pursue spiritual maturity.

Verses 5 to 9. And as we focus on the hope of being welcomed into God's eternal kingdom. Verses 10 to 11. So God has actually given us all we need to be spiritually mature, to live a godly life.

And we do this in God's power. Now godliness in verse 3 is to be our calling. And is prominent at the beginning of this letter.

[6:04] The Greek word *eusebia* literally translates good worship. So godliness is good worship. And we all worship something.

And the test is easy. The things we worship, if you worship something, you make sacrifices for it, and you make time for it. Because you're devoted to that.

If we worship anything in creation, we'll always wind up dissatisfied. And if you are building your nest in idols of this world, God will shake that tree up until you build your nest on Jesus the rock.

Worshipping our creator is *eusebia*. It's godliness. It's good worship. This is not confined to Sundays. It's 24-7. And contrary to what the world thinks, it actually frees us and gives us life to the full and abundance.

Peter makes it clear. God has given us everything we need for a new spiritual life and good worship through knowledge of him. As a result, we receive in abundance God's grace and peace.

[7:12] Now this is God's work. By his own goodness, he has called us. God has made known to us all that we require to lead lives pleasing to him. We no longer need to be ignorant.

This is made possible in God's power, actively displayed in the gospel. We know this. It's by his righteousness, glory and goodness. In response to the gospel, we can experience redemption through Jesus and have an intimate and informed relationship with God.

Again, this is all God's work. As God calls us by his power, his Holy Spirit transforms us from the inside out and enables us to participate in the divine nature of Jesus. What a privilege to be a recipient of God's great and precious promises that have become available and fulfilled in Christ.

Now I've been trying to think of an illustration that gives justice to God's power and I'm not going to be successful in this, but it's not like plugging in a power cord and switching on the PowerPoint and getting a jolt or something like that because then that's us doing all the work.

I've got this illustration. It's... Anyway, bear with me. A few years ago, PlayStation came out for the first time and one of the games was Simpsons Wrestling.

[8:30] Hands up. People know Simpsons, right? I can draw on this. Simpsons Wrestling, you would wrestle, you'd choose a person and you'd get in the ring and they would have secret weapons like Barney would have a burp and Homer...

A Mo would throw scooters of beer or something. Mr Burns, now if you know the character Mr Burns, he is really weak. He is pathetically weak. At one point, there's an episode where he wrestles with a baby.

A baby is holding a teddy bear, Bobo the bear and he's wrestling with the baby to get the bear off her and he can't and he goes, oh, you win because he's just so weak.

Anyway, in Simpsons Wrestling, Mr Burns gets in the ring then he gets out and he says, Smithers, get him and Smithers fights on Mr Burns' behalf and Mr Burns does no fighting.

Smithers fights on Mr Burns' behalf. I often feel like Mr Burns. I actually feel weak. You know, I need help. I need reminding that we need to pray.

[9:37] We can't do this walk of following Jesus in our own strength on our own and we need to be less of us and more of Christ. He needs to be more in us because he goes with us and he goes before us and he carries us and I just was reminded of that passage in 2 Samuel 5 verse 24 where David's been praying, God, should I go into battle against these Philistines?

I'm not feeling equipped. I'm not... And we read that the Lord went before David with the sound of marching in the treetops.

Can you imagine being the other side of the trees and the Philistines are there and they're going, David's army's coming and he's... And God marches in the treetops.

You'd be terrified. You'd be dropping your weapon. You'd be heading to the hills. The Lord went before him and in Romans 8 31 reminded, if God is for us, who can be against us?

And in 1 Peter 1 5, through faith, we are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in that last time.

[10:47] And faith is really... It's saying, this is where our confidence and trust is. We're placing our confidence and trust in the resurrected Jesus.

This needs to energise us and fill us and it will shield us from spiritual attacks. Do we get this? Are you feeling overwhelmed? Are you feeling fearful or anxious?

Are you trying to do things in your own strength? God's power is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. It's the power that transforms lives and it's the power that takes us from darkness into light, from death to life and it's the power that renews and restores and it's the power that will raise us from the dead and bring us into the eternal kingdom.

Surely this is an incentive to pray. Pray to our great powerful God to go with us, to carry us and to go before us.

It's God's new beginning that starts in us. In verse 4 it enables believers to escape the corruption of the world caused by evil desires. I don't know if you remember but last year I did ask you to close your eyes and visualise being in a dark prison cell every one of us despairing, no way out and we hear a battle going on outside and a wounded man with the only key opens up that cell door bearing the marks of the cross and Jesus leads us out and our chains fall off and he brings us into the light.

[12:24] It's madness to want to go back to the cell. It's madness to look back. Lot's wife looked back, look what happened to her. But I know that Satan's in the darkness there with a grappling hook and he's slinging it out there and he wants to grab onto our ankles and drag us back in.

Focus on Jesus, focus on the light. In 1 Corinthians 7 verse 10 we read Paul says, Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regrets but worldly sorrow leads to death.

And why is that? Because have you ever found yourself saying I'm sorry and then doing it again? Oh, I'm sorry and doing it again? Oh, I'm sorry and doing it again? So that's worldly sorrow.

But godly sorrow leads to repentance in other words a transformation of your mind and your life and it has no regrets. You don't look back and go like gee I wish I was still doing that. God has actually given us all we need to be spiritually mature to live a godly life.

So how do we finish well? As God has provided us with the power to live godly lives Peter makes it clear we need to live godly lives. Verse 5 For this reason we make every effort.

[13:34] We must actively pursue and choose spiritual maturity. This is not a matter Christians can treat lightly. It's a goal to which we need to give ourselves body and soul every day of our lives.

And Peter outlines here an eight step plan to godliness. This is to be deliberate intentional and will keep us from being ineffective and unproductive. Now the literary form here that Peter uses doesn't mean we're to manifest these virtues in specific order when in fact in verse 8 he encourages us to possess them all in increasing measure which assumes or implies that we have these to some degree.

But Peter bookends his eight step plan for growth in holiness with faith and love. Be careful though this isn't a checklist that we can tick off to suddenly have a works based eschatological deliverance. We're still saved by faith and faith is foundational Christian virtue with it we respond to God's call and come to know God and his son Jesus. So love is not the only is not only the final and greatest Christian virtue it's also the glue that holds the rest of things together.

Faith and love. Jesus himself said by this will all people know that you are my followers you are my disciples if you have love for one another. It should be visible.

[15:02] God's eight step plan that Peter outlines here. Remember faith is simply confidence and trust and so we've got to realise where am I putting my confidence and trust?

Am I putting it in myself or in the gospel and in the Lord Jesus? So beginning with faith add to your faith goodness. it's okay to be good. Moral excellence.

It's funny how modern atheists claim it's a great evil to tell people about Jesus and they've even used the words it's child abuse but it's actually good to share the good news and so add to your faith goodness and to this add knowledge which is important enough for Peter to mention here four times.

Know God. Walk with God. Listen to God. Grow in your knowledge and understanding of God as we draw near to God each day through prayer and reading the scriptures. So how are we going with four or more?

In order to make progress and grow we need to prioritise this. While knowledge is essential we have to be careful it's one thing to know it's another thing to live it and knowledge isn't to puff up our heads or egos it's love that builds up.

[16:26] Studying God's word we obviously want to learn more and more about our loving saviour but it's one thing to hear it and know it and it's another thing to have a heart response and apply it to our lives.

There's a danger in the Sydney Diocese I don't know if you picked up there is an intellectual snobbery and we can forget to love one another. I do have a friend who goes to church in this area and they said they overheard they're not in vocational ministry but they overheard some pastors at their church talking and these pastors were saying and they're really disappointed to hear this I am too I'm glad we're all four year trained here I just don't think I could a third year trained could keep up with us this is theology training yeah can you believe that that's the dialogue that took place anyway at the end of the day it's a pretty simple message the theologian Carl Barth when asked in 1962 on his one visit to America how he would summarise the essence of millions of words he'd published he replied Jesus loves me this I know because the Bible told me so the goal of knowing God is not to puff up it should lead us to love and to build up this knowledge helps us to discern God's will and orient our lives in accordance with his will to knowledge we need to add self-control which is essential if we're to avoid falling prey to temptations especially in this current era a western secularised consumerist culture and it's all about instant gratification in the past we had to wait now we can have everything now delivered to your door smartphones you can access anything at your fingertips self-control is a rarity today and again we were reminded of the heartbeat on Thursday self-control isn't trying harder or even an act of the will it's a matter of the heart and following what you love the most and our heart has to be aligned with loving God and that will shape our desires and transform our hearts to self-control perseverance hang in there bear up in the face of troubles persecutions pleasures worries stand firm finish the race persevere stay focused be future focused long term to perseverance godliness become people who please

God in every phase of life remember that godliness you see is good worship and to godliness mutual affection treat people with active compassion and to this love love that binds them all together and I've just had a few people in the last little while say they've felt that coming to this church they've felt welcomed they feel loved and that's a good thing we're doing good stuff there if we possess these in increasing measure they will keep us from being ineffective unproductive and from falling too many Christians in the west are content simply by saying you know what I'm saved Peter makes it clear God wants us to never rest content with such a minimal albeit important level of Christian experience true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ should always spark the unquenchable desire to know knowing better and better and seek to use that knowledge in the service of others to take that next step Peter suggests our relationship with Christ should be evident in our renewed lifestyle it's interesting whenever we grow in God's knowledge of God's word we can become encouraged but we also can become convicted it's like a double edged sword and part of me sometimes thinks that's why we don't read God's word because we know it's going to hit home and go oh okay got a bit of work to do there Lord because it's a two edged sword we can be encouraged but also convicted and have you experienced this when you find experiencing what's called cognitive dissonance this is where we believe something and say something but then we actually live a different life to some degree things they don't always match up so often the very thing we struggle with is jumping off the pages of scripture convicting us and then we find ourselves and this happens from the pulpit you know

I've been wrestling with this passage and we find ourselves thinking how can I speak on this or call others to this behaviour that the scriptures are screaming at us almost when it's the very thing I struggle with it's a common feeling for every one of us in ministry and remember if you're a born again Christian you're in ministry even if it's not vocational wherever you are in life we're all in ministry when we call others to live according to God's word and yet struggle to keep God's word ourselves we can feel like fakes hypocritical and the danger is we can be silenced into inactivity if we fail to repent there's a risk of skimming over tricky passages or making light of some sin and our current culture actually affirms and appreciates us going all quiet because when you feel you've got a struggle and it's holding you back somehow and it ends up I don't think I'm going to be effective sharing the gospel with someone it does render us silent and people go beauty you keep your faith to yourself

[22:07] I actually want you to have your own quiet personal faith and it's just between you I don't want to know about it we've always got to stay faithful to God's word no compromise no lobster in a pot warming up getting cooked by our culture be encouraged I can guarantee we are all a work in progress and we will always need God's grace we will always be convicted if we open God's word but leave your guilt at the foot of the cross stand firm and grow in spiritual maturity so how do we finish well we need to intentionally focus on the gospel it really is good news Peter is clear this will shape us as we experience a new birth and a new identity we now have power new power for new living clothed in the divine nature of Christ we are called to holiness and because we belong to God we don't live for this world point three focus on the hope of being welcomed into

God's eternal kingdom what a great joy that will be no more struggles be future focused sharpen your thinking on what is to come this life is short eternity is forever when we live our day to day lives when we make decisions the motivations of our hearts all these need to be shaped by a singular focus on our future hope Peter's intent for writing this letter and his first letter are actually outlined in chapter 2 verse 1 sorry 2 Peter 3 verse 1 this is what he says look at it dear friends this is now my second letter to you I've written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking being intentional all starts in our head Peter wants to stimulate the elect to wholesome thinking and this is crucial for us all this 8 step plan starts with intentional choices we need to connect our heads and our hearts knowing what we need to do to live a godly life we need to put it into practice and why is this so important verse 4 reminds us having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires we need to maintain our efforts and focus our efforts on Christ likeness so there's this saying

I want to give you guys which I've used with my classes over the years and you've probably heard it and it's using a gardening image or a farming image you know how we sow something and reap so if you sow a thought you will reap an action and if you sow that action then you will reap a habit and if you sow that habit you'll reap a character the person you're becoming and if you sow that character you're actually going to reap a destiny habits don't just fill the day they shape our character little steps help us towards the end goal so each morning we wake up and Jesus hasn't returned yet so a thought today I'm going to just talk to God I want to pray reap an action talking to God you're praying sow a thought today I'm going to invite someone to Alpha reap an action so a thought today I'm going to read God's word reap an action you read God's word sow a thought I'm going to resist evil that thing I'm struggling with reap an action habit forming 40 days you can break a habit 40 days sow a thought reap an action sow that action reap a habit

I'm reading the Bible regularly now I'm praying regularly now sow that habit reap a character and a destiny I've got a screensaver on my computer you know when it shuts down or comes up it's the backdrop whatever it's called and it's 2 Corinthians 10 verse 5 it's my reminder take captive this is for me but take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ our thoughts lead to actions our actions lead to habits and their character forming Galatians 6 says this whoever sows to please their flesh from the flesh will reap destruction whoever sows to please the spirit from the spirit will reap eternal life remain in Christ verse 3 his divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life to put into practice godly lifestyle choices that will keep us from being ineffective and unproductive and we need to possess these qualities in increasing measure faith goodness knowledge self control perseverance godliness mutual affection and love 100% we're saved by grace salvation is the work of god want to go to the distance and finish well 100% make every effort to confirm your calling for spiritual maturity and we must actively pursue spiritual maturity verses 10 and 11 therefore therefore brothers and sisters make every effort to confirm your calling for if you

do these things you will never stumble and you receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our lord and saviour jesus christ let's pray good and gracious god we give thanks that in your great mercy you've given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of jesus christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade kept in heaven for those who through faith are shielded by your power until the coming salvation shape us change us strengthen and shield us through trials and may we shine the light of jesus as strangers in this world awaiting in joyful anticipation our eternal home in heaven in jesus name we pray amen