

Pursue the Promises

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Preacher: Steve Aiken

[0 : 00] First five verses of 2 Peter chapter 1. If you want to look it up in your Bible while I take a drink. I should have told the operators behind ahead of time, but I...

This letter is from Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ. I'm writing to you who share the same precious faith we have.

This faith was given to you because of the justice and fairness of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior. May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus Christ our Lord.

By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him. The one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence.

And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

[1 : 20] In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. God has given us everything we need to live a godly life by his divine power, by coming to know him.

He has given us great and precious promises, not just eternal life someday. He has given us a promise of abundant life right now, along with authority, power, and gifts to transform lives and nations.

And not just nebulous lives out there, but people that we know that need to be transformed. Peter writes that these promises would enable us to share God's divine power and escape the world's corruption.

In so doing, we become powerful witnesses to all those our lives touch. But there's a catch. The catch is we have to walk in them.

The promises on the page are useless unless we embrace them and put them into action. The U.S. Constitution and American law assured freedom for every citizen, regardless of their color.

[2 : 31] It was there on paper and in the law books. Unfortunately, in some southern states, certain officials decided they would withhold this promise from the blacks.

They used intimidation and violence to enforce their prejudice, much like certain governments today, including our own, hinder what is promised. And if you don't notice that our government is hindering the promises, they've taken away our rights to put up the rights of others, just read the newspaper.

Martin Luther King Jr. and other blacks decided to act for the promises, just as Emmeline Pankhurst and other women did in this nation for the vote. Though costly and requiring perseverance, they won.

What are you and I doing for the great and precious promises God makes available to us? Here these people were willing to lay down their lives for something that's not going to last more than their lifetime for them.

And some of them died before they even got it. A number of those ladies died before they got the right to vote. A number of blacks died before they were able to vote in America.

[3 : 48] But they pursued the promises. And that's what I want to talk about this morning is for the promises.

What are you and I doing for the great and precious promises God makes available to us? Are we walking in his freedom and liberty or are we still bound in some way by Satan's intimidation?

Are we free from fear, sin, mental torment, wrong habits, unbelief, or shame? Does the enemy have any stronghold or influence in us that hinders us from coming in the fullness of God's promises?

Maybe you and I are free like many blacks in the northern states of America were free to vote when those in the south weren't. Because the law allowed blacks to vote.

The ones in the north could vote. But because of the intimidation of certain officials in the south, some couldn't. And some in the north didn't bother them.

[4 : 56] Does it bother us that some people aren't coming in to the promises? Maybe we're free, but what about those around us? What are those in your family, your neighborhoods, at your work, in the houses around this church building?

Those kids that are going to get on that Eden bus. C.T. Studd grew up in a wealthy Christian family, studied at Eden, and was a brilliant cricketer.

He was set for an influential career and easy life. That is until God got a hold of his heart. C.T. Studd gave it all away to become a missionary, first to China, then to Africa, enduring incredible hardship to see many people come to faith.

I encourage you, if you haven't read his biography, it's well worth reading. A quote of his that still stirs my heart challenges. And he said, Some wish to live within the sound of church and chapel bell.

I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. In a sense, this church is only a few yards from hell. As is many of our homes and workplaces.

[6 : 12] Because wherever Satan is operating, then that's hell being worked out. Peter could identify with this.

He laid down his life for God's promises that set people free and challenged others to do the same. It drove C.T. Studd, Hudson Taylor, Mary Slessor, Gladys Allward, and thousands of others to do the same.

Many believers around the world are still doing this for the promises. All you have to do is read about what's happening in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and others.

People that are in Eritrea, in Ethiopia. One's Christians that are being persecuted for their faith. In Eritrea, there's all kinds of Christians that are locked up in these steel containers.

I don't know if you've ever been inside these 20-foot steel containers, these shipping containers. Here you'd freeze to death. But can you imagine being locked up those in Eritrea with this heat?

[7 : 17] Because of their faith. For the promises. These folk endured for the promises. Like Peter, we have the same kind of faith.

The living and powerful faith in Jesus Christ. We have seen how this faith has transformed our lives. Some of you more dramatically than others. But each one a miracle.

And we have witnessed how this faith has made a difference in others. But there is more. I believe this is why Peter was writing his second epistle. He wanted those believers to hunger for more.

No doubt, like you and me, they have been transformed by the Holy Spirit working in them. And they have seen the changes in others who had come to faith. But what were they doing now?

In Revelation chapter 2, Jesus acknowledges what the church of Ephesus accomplished. But he challenges them for more. I want to read the first four verses of Revelation chapter 2.

[8 : 23] Where Jesus told John, Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is a message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand. The one who walks among the seven gold lampstands.

I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not.

You have discovered they are liars. You have patiently suffered for me without quitting. But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first.

Now before anybody gets upset, I'm not saying this applies to you, okay? What I'm saying is what, even though they were doing a brilliant job in many ways, the Lord said, there's more.

And that's what I'm saying. There's more. You know, sometimes it's easy to camp at a comfortable place, isn't it? You know, say, you know, Andy Murray, who's doing brilliantly.

[9 : 30] I don't know how he's doing in America right now, whether he's going to make it all the way to the final or not. But a brilliant athlete. And can you imagine all these different tournaments he goes to and he's working hard?

Can you imagine what would happen if he goes through all these different tournaments, beating all these other champions? He gets up there and he gets to Wimbledon or the Olympics and then he

sits in the stands with the spectators.

Everybody's like, what are you doing? And sometimes we as a church are doing that, aren't we? We have different trials and tribulations and God helps us.

And then we come, well, there's more promises. We come and say, God, I've had enough. Let somebody else do it. And God says, no, there's more. There's more that I want you to come into. There's more joy. There's more power and authority. There's more lives that I want to transform through you. I mean, there's some times that I thought, God, I really want to retire, God.

[10:41] I want to rest. And then he burns within me his word. You know, my value isn't in preaching or teaching or pastoring.

My value is just because Jesus died for me. And that's for every one of us, isn't it? Our value is not something we do or a job we do or whatever or how much money we have.

Our value is just because Jesus died for us. Our value is just because Jesus died for us. The most wonderful being in the universe who loved us so much. He gave up everything to come.

Take upon himself our sin and shame. But he says there's more. There's more. Can you imagine? And I just said that about Annie Murray. For those great and magnificent promises, God wants more for us. So what are some of these promises?

[11:39] And I have five promises. I know there's a lot more, but I want to list five promises. Now, how are we doing? Am I going over time? I'm okay?

Your roast isn't burning? The first one is eternal life. And that's the most wonderful one of all, isn't it?

To be with the one who loves us more than anyone else in the universe. To be with him forever is the best. Peter speaks of it in 2 Peter 1.11.

Then God will give you a grand entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That's the best. But then another one is the Holy Spirit.

The Lord knew we needed help. He knew we needed to be led into all truth. He knew that we need extra power and authority to minister what he promises.

[12:39] And so he said, I'm going to send you another helper. We need the Holy Spirit. And may I encourage you every day, not only get into the word of God so you know what God thinks and keep feeding yourself on the word, but ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh.

To fill you up. We need the Holy Spirit. The third one I have is greater works. In John 14.12, Jesus declares, I tell you the truth.

Anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done and even greater works because I am going to be with the Father. That's in the Bible, isn't it?

How many have come into this yet? How many here have come into greater works than Jesus did? I haven't. But I'm pursuing it. That's a promise. Think, oh no, that's just for ones like Benny Hinn or Billy Graham or whatever.

[13:45] No. He was saying it to all of his disciples. And if you have put your faith in Jesus, it's for you. What greater works are we pursuing? Each of us have had some fruitfulness in our life.

But God wants more. The fourth one I have is the kingdom. After challenging his disciples to seek his kingdom and everything they needed would be added to them, Jesus declares in Luke 12.32, So don't be afraid, little flock, for it gives the Father great happiness to give you the kingdom.

He told Peter, he says, I will give you, and it's to us as well, he says, I will give you the keys to the kingdom. The kingdom of God, to bring the kingdom of God into people's lives.

Because when we bring the kingdom of God into people's lives, that's where the transformation takes place. And all the world around may be a mess, but we can see the kingdom of God operating in us as individuals in all those lives that our lives touch.

We may feel insignificant in times in the midst of the overwhelming challenges of life, but God has promised his kingdom. And he wants us to walk in it now as we rule and reign with him in heavenly places.

[15:15] Now, I know that there's some teaching and some Christians, and that's debatable, that God is going to bring his whole kingdom here on earth, and they believe it in a different way.

But that's fine. You know, if you believe that or whatever, you can investigate it. But the thing is that he does want to bring his kingdom into individual lives. If you have put your faith in Jesus and walking in him, then the kingdom of God is operating in you.

And the key is to get that. God wants that kingdom in other people as well. And when there's enough people that have the kingdom of God operating in them, then that changes communities, and that changes governments.

The fifth one is prayer. You know, that's... God has given us the promise of prayer. That we have incredible power and authority in prayer.

There's amazing things, and I think it's in James chapter 5. I forget which verse it is. What, 17 or something like that? I may know George will know it.

[16:35] But these ones have all that... I know the basic place. It says, The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man affecteth much.

It's hard to beat the King James on that verse. Or the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous woman. There is power in prayer. And Jesus promises in John 14, 13 and 14, You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it.

So that the Son can bring glory to his Father. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. He also declares in Matthew 7, verses 7 and 8, Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for.

Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

God has given us incredible authority in prayer. Now, I know years ago, when Janice Joplin was singing at Woodstock, she says, Lord, why don't you grant me a Mercedes Benz?

[17:48] All my friends have Porsches, and I must make amends. Some of you weren't around at that time. God doesn't give in to wrong prayers.

But he's saying, Ask me, and I will show you great and mighty things you know not of. He wants us to reach out and do incredible things in prayer.

Because when we really believe that God really promised this, we can see amazing things happen. And I have seen them over the years.

These are only five of many great and precious promises, all of which we've heard before. All of which we've come into to some degree, but all of which a father wants us to come deeper.

Because it glorifies him. And when we glorify God, it draws us closer to him and reveals him to others. Because it makes us more fruitful and effective in our life.

[18:51] And when we're more fruitful and effective, there's greater satisfaction and joy and fulfillment in us. Because it shows others the way to God so they may partake in these wonderful promises as well.

And finally, it attacks and tears down the kingdom of darkness. When we live for God and walk in his promises, then it automatically attacks the kingdom of darkness.

So how do we do this? And I'm almost done. The answer is in the verse three. We have all received all of this by coming to know him.

The one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence is by coming to know him, isn't it? As John writes in 1 John chapter 1, he says, we proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, who we have heard and seen.

We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is a word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us and we have seen him.

[20:02] And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the father and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us.

And our fellowship is with the father and with his son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

Their salvation, life, peace, joy, and fruitfulness came from their personal relationship with God. Just knowing him gave them life and power that enabled them and us to change the world.

Wherever you are in your walk with God, there's more. There's no condemnation. We don't compare ourselves to others, but there's great and precious promises that God wants us to come into in a deeper way.

Let's pray. Lord.