

February 3, 2008
Houghton Lake UMC

“In Praise of God for What He Promises”

II Peter 1:1-11

God has done great things! From the beginning of this year we have been reflecting on and praising God for the great things we now understand. I want to list them again, and then offer another group of things to understand. We praised God for revealing Himself to us in wonderful ways. We praised God for who He is in essence and character. We praised God for what He does for us and for what He has given to us, both in temporal and spiritual blessings.

Today I want to Praise God for what He promises. I want to praise God because the promises of God are so wonderful. In fact, the power of the New Testament comes to us through the promises Jesus made to us in the Gospels. That power is demonstrated by the changed lives we see all around us as people are led to seek God through confession, repentance, and obedience, and find a new life in Jesus Christ, the savior of the world. The preaching of the gospel has the power to transform people who honestly seek the Lord and accept God’s promises for themselves. We know this because God has worked that same miracle in our own lives. As we gather together, one Christian disciple with another Christian disciple, we become the church and the church alone is one piece of evidence that God is active in the world and that He keeps His promises.

God has done great things! We discover that God loves us just as we are. Praise the Lord that we can come to God as children in great need, and God loves us and accepts us and forgives us of our sins!

However, God’s love is proven even greater when God refuses to leave us just as we are. God loves us, forgives us, adopts us into His salvation family, and then He seeks to mold us to be like Jesus in character and purpose. God shows His love to us through His vigilant care day by day, seeking to mold us into His likeness so that we have our Father’s eyes -- and how we want to be like Him! Then God works with us to take us from where we are to where we need to be... so that we can eventually be like God in holiness and character, and then enter His eternal kingdom! Now,

granted, God does most of the work on the inside of us, but in the course of walking with God by faith God calls us to do some outward things, as well.

This is what Peter is sharing with us in his second epistle. Our text today, II Peter 1:1-11, teaches us that there is much more to being a disciple of Jesus than just asking for His forgiveness. Salvation is our spiritual birth. It is just the beginning of a spiritual adventure into a whole new life... a whole new lifestyle. Salvation gets us started by teaching us that we have an advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has now become our partner. Salvation tells us that from this moment on Jesus wants to walk with us and wants to show us this life from God's perspective. Our salvation births within us "salvation faith", and puts us on the road of walking by faith, a spiritual walk with Jesus day by day that teaches us God's power, grace, and perspective of life through daily devotion and spiritual practice.

However, it is not long before we realize that God can and will do more than one thing at a time. As we walk with the Lord, as we begin to see the world from God's perspective, God begins to mold us into His likeness. God begins to shape our values, our lifestyle, and our motives to please Him. Often times, shortly after our salvation, we find ourselves at odds with our friends and family -- especially if they are not saved. We find ourselves estranged from those friends and instead attracted to new friends who also want to please God. Through this tension we are sometimes forced to be a vocal witness to what God has done in our lives because the world thinks we have lost our marbles! We discover that we are already witnesses of God's salvation work in our own lives. God then puts us into situations where He calls us to publicly share our experience. Then God leads us forward by faith to add things to our faith, and soon we are praising God for what he promises.

II Peter 1:3 reminds us that "His 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." What has God given us? Let's list some things: God has revealed Himself to us. God has demonstrated through our salvation that His character is holy, good, kind, and that God can be trusted. God has

shown us what He does when a sinful heart comes to Him in repentance. God has come along side us in personal, spiritual relationship to help us walk by faith. God has given us spiritual friends and the church to help us walk in covenant with God day by day. God gives us wisdom and knowledge of spiritual things as we read the Bible and put what we learn into practice. And God does these things so that we will know in our own experience that God is at work in us and through us, and that walking by faith really works in life today.

Peter shares with us verse 4: “Through these God 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.”

What promises are those?

God has given us promises for our spiritual needs, promises for our personal needs, and promises for our future needs. God has given us promises about His vigilant care, His help in time of trouble, and God promises blessing upon blessing through our obedience to Him. God gives promises for overcoming anger, fear, frustration, depression and trouble. God has given promises to marriages, to business ventures, to social ills and to churches and even governments. We have promises related to our finances and to our character. God has given promises to the afflicted, to believers, to the humble and to the generous, to the obedient, to the penitent, to the poor, and to those who seek Him. God even has promises concerning his promises. But the purpose of this sermon is not to list the promises of God. For that you can buy books at the Christian bookstore that contain lists upon lists.

My purpose in coming to this passage today is to show why God has given us His promises. Look again at verse 4: “Through these God has given us his very great and precious promises, (for what purpose?) so that through them (through the promises) you may participate (in what?) in the divine nature (you can also be molded to be like God in character and nature) and (then) escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” This is the goal of learning and trusting God’s promises. This is the goal of all that God is trying to do in your life. He wants to mold you into His

image. He wants to restore that image of God in you that sin destroyed, so that you can “escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

Then Peter continues in verse 5 and following by giving us a list of things we need to work on. Faith gets us started, but Peter urges us to add to our faith other spiritual attributes. Let’s read what Peter says...

“For this reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; (Notice that faith by itself is not necessarily good -- it needs goodness added to it.) “and to goodness, (add) knowledge; (notice that faith and goodness need knowledge. Faith and goodness are not enough.) “and to knowledge, (add) self-control; (notice that knowledge is not enough; faith, goodness, and knowledge need self-control.) “and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.” (In the Greek “agapan”, the “in spite of kind of love”, the “agape” love that God gives to us.)

This is quite a list. Peter is serious in giving us this list. This list is the agenda of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. This is a list of things Peter is calling us to add to our “God-like character” as we walk by faith.

Peter then offers the reason for all of this work: “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is a New Testament promise.

“But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.” And what will happen? The new disciple can backslide, or worse, they can become lukewarm, grow very little, and stay a baby Christian throughout the rest of their life.

Peter then gives us this exhortation: “Therefore, my brothers (and sisters) be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

...another New Testament promise.

Friends, God wants us to grow as His disciples. The role of the church is to assist in that growth. The church has been given only one primary task, that being The Great Commission. Jesus told us in Matthew 28: “Go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” This is the entire reason the church exists, and it needs to be the one primary thing we do. How that works begins with salvation in one heart. That one heart is then molded to be like Jesus. It is a cycle we need to see happening in our church. Making disciples boils down to one heart being changed, then gifted, then called, then equipped, and then sent to another person who is changed, then gifted, then called, then equipped, and then sent back into the world as a witness so the cycle can happen again and again and again. As a result the church grows, the community changes, the kingdom of God grows, and we praise the Lord for what He promises. All of us witness God’s work in the people around us and we are spurred again to walk by faith on the water of God’s promises, day by day.

Today I Praise the Lord for what He promises -- and for the fact that we are a part of those promises as we walk faithfully with Jesus and become witnesses of all that God does in us, around us, and through us.

Let us pray.

Thank you Lord for the promises we can stand upon. Thank you for your presence in our lives and for the precious promises we can rely upon, day by day. Help us to know where we are in the cycle of discipleship, and help us move to the next step in our spiritual growth. Help us to eventually be in ministry to impact the world around us and witness to your love, your power, your grace, and your very precious and active promises. In your name we pray. Amen.