

LIGHT IN A DARK PLACE

II Peter 1:1-4

The Christian's life is portrayed in the New Testament as one of progress, a life that is constantly enriched and is ever enlarging. Of course, there is a place where that life begins. The believer obtains precious faith "through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," and becomes a child of God. As such he is an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. He has an inheritance in Christ. To him has been bequeathed a great fortune. He is the heir of a vast estate.

Peter wrote this letter to comfort and to encourage Christians who were confronted with grievous problems in the world about them, and also by problems within their church which arose primarily because of false teachings. Their faith had been shaken; some of them were beginning to question and to demand an answer; they were uncertain about various things. Peter's object in writing this letter was to comfort them and to build them up in the faith.

The first thing Peter told those to whom he was writing, which was absolutely essential, was that they should be certain of their faith, or that they must know exactly what they believe and why they believe it. There was only one faith, namely, the faith of the Apostles, the faith that was delivered unto them, the faith of which they were made the guardians and the custodians. The great central characteristic of that faith was that it centered upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The only way that men can be made right with God is by the righteousness that is given to them through and in Christ.

Peter described that faith as being "precious." What does that mean? It means that it is very valuable, something that is beyond computation, something that is of greater value than life itself. Let me illustrate. A man loses his health. In consulting his physician, he says, "If you know of anything that can be done for me, please tell me about it. I don't care what it costs. After all, what's the value of money without health? Because my health is so precious, I will mortgage anything I have to get the treatment that I need." That is what Peter says about the Christian faith. Is this teaching about Christ being our righteousness precious to you?

Why is the faith precious? Because it is the faith that justifies. It is the faith that enables the believer to know that he stands guiltless in the presence of God. Can anybody measure or compute the value of that -- a knowledge that God has forgiven you, the fear of death and of the grave gone, a conscience void of offense, and the realization that you can face any accuser and point to Jesus Christ? Money and learning and all that the world can give you can never give you peace of mind and peace of conscience. God's Word sets forth the great doctrines of justification, sanctification, and glorification in and through Christ. Justification takes place when one is saved, sanctification takes place during the Christian life on earth, and glorification takes place when one is taken from the earth to live with the Lord forever. The faith and assurance that God has forgiven you, sustained you, and given you the assurance that you shall spend eternity with Him is truly "precious." Those who have this faith possess both grace and peace, and they can be increased greatly "through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." Don't you need to have your faith increased and strengthened?

One can easily imagine somebody approaching the Apostle and saying, "That is very wonderful, but how is it to be done? Isn't it an utterly impossible task? We are living in a world that is against us, a world that is contradictory, and you are asking us to be Christ-like here on earth, to live and to show forth the virtues and excellencies of God Himself. That is impossible, it simply cannot be done. The world is against us, and we are weak. You are setting the standard too high. How can we reach the standard?" Peter answers this question by saying that all things that appertain unto life and godliness have already been given to us. "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." In other words, there is no excuse for any one of us failing to be what God has willed we should be. Everything you need is there for you. All the things that are necessary for life and godliness are given to us in and by and through the knowledge of God that we have in Jesus Christ.

All things that are necessary for life and godliness are provided for in the exceeding great and precious promises -- "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." It is characteristic of rational creatures to make promises. It seems to be the characteristic of some to break promises. This frailty notwithstanding, the activities of men proceed on the assumed strength of promises made and the accumulated strength of promises kept.

Wondrously enough, the Bible reveals God as a Promisor and man as a promisee. To His dependent creatures He is the God of promises -- Covenant-maker and Covenant-keeper. So close is the connection between His character and His covenant that to get hold of His promises is to get hold of God Himself. Someone has well said: "God's promises are projections of Himself to the measure of our finite capacity, by which we, by appropriating them to ourselves, may draw in thus much of God to ourselves." This helps us to realize why Peter described the promises as being the greatest and most precious. They represent the superlative in the realm of contract and assurance.

God's exceeding great and precious promises are an expression of His loving kindness and tender mercy, and His indication of the bountiful provision. He has made for the manifold needs of His people. God has entered into a covenant with His people and has made certain guarantees to them. Those guarantees have been reinforced by His gracious promises.

There is a promise in the Bible for every need known to man. Without a doubt God is able to supply every need of ours according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. We may fortify our souls by meditating on the promises of God. Not a one of God's promises will do us any good unless we utilize it by faith and prayer and receive its life-giving waters into our hearts. A promise is one thing, and possession is another. It is not a question of how many promises are in the Bible, but how many of these promises do we possess by actual experience through faith and prayer. To Joshua God said, "Go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, into the land which I do give to them." Such was the promise, but the one condition of possession was the placing of the feet upon the land. So God has many promises for His children, but we need to place our feet upon what He has promised.

The promises of the Bible are generally declarations which God has made of His intentions to bestow blessings upon His children. Spurgeon once said, "No one ever wanders where a promise does not follow him, an atmosphere of promise surrounds believers, as air surrounds the globe." Every promise is a note upon the bank of

faith in which there are infinite resources, and God is the banker. A promise is a written or verbal declaration made by one person to another, which binds the person who makes it to do or to refrain from doing a certain specified act. God's promises cannot fail.

As one studies God's Word, he finds that it is a casket of precious promises backed by the oath of God, revealed through the sacrifice of Christ, and appropriated and corroborated by a multitude of believers. God's promises are ripened fruit to be plucked by the hand of prayer. The promises energize prayer, but prayer appropriates and obtains what has been promised. The promises are like the rain and snow which come down from heaven, and prayer is like the pipes, which transmit, preserve, and direct the rain and melted snow. Prayer takes hold of the promises and conducts them to personal fulfillment. Prayer is the hand of faith stretched out to receive the blessings promised.

The promises are free. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." The promises are given unto us. We do not merit them. We cannot buy them. We cannot earn them. They are an expression of God's free and unmerited love for His children. Because He has given us these promises no one can ever take them away from us.

Peter wrote, "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." "All things" include all grace, all love, all power, all wisdom, all patience, and all courage that shall ever be needed by those who would live godly lives in an ungodly world. Marvelous is the fact, and thrilling is the contemplation of it, that God has looked down through your tomorrows and mine, has taken the measure of every foe we shall ever face, every temptation or test we shall ever encounter, every loss we shall ever experience, every sorrow through which we shall pass, every emergency that shall ever arise, and against the day of every such need He has laid up for us those divine resources that will, if appropriated, make us "more than conquerors." These promises are an essential part of this total provision.

A wealthy spendthrift ran through with his fortune. His only son inherited nothing more than the heavily mortgaged house in which the father lived and died. The son decided that the premises needed some attention. One day a workman, digging in the yard, turned up a lump of something which showed a bright spot at the point where the pick had struck it. The lump was tested and the report was "copper ore." So rich was the vein of copper thus discovered that from the profits derived therefrom the son was able to pay off the mortgage, buy up much of the surrounding property which had once formed his father's estate, and live thereafter in security and comfort. The father had died in virtual poverty when in point of fact he had been walking for a long time on unsuspected riches. Because he knew nothing about it, the wealth beneath his feet did not do him any good.

Spiritually speaking, our penury or near-penury must be due either to our ignorance of the mighty promises and provisions of our God or to our indifference. Our Heavenly Father does not want us to be starvelings on scant rations, but rather that we shall be fed, clothed and housed in a manner befitting those who are the children of the great King. With so many invitations to draw upon the bounty of

the Lord, needy Christians may ask and receive the fullness of a loving God.

An account is given of an old lady in England, whose only son had gone away from home. In her loneliness and poverty she was visited by a minister of the Gospel. He said to her, "Has your boy not sent you any money?" "No," she replied, "Not a cent since he went away." With that she took her well-worn Bible from the shelf, saying, "In every letter he sends these bits of paper." The mother handed the papers to the minister. On examination it was found that they were checks. How surprised the old mother was to learn that she was in comfortable circumstances, with plenty to live on until her son returned to his home. No matter what your need may be, God is able to supply it.

God's promises are exceeding great. They come from a great God, they come to great sinners, they deal with great matters, they assure us of great love, and they produce in Christians great results. The promises of God are so great that they stretch through time into eternity, and cover every need of the spirit, mind, and body.

"God hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways
All our lives through;
God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow,
Peace without pain.

"But God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the laborer,
Light for the way,
Grace for the trials,
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love."

The promises of God exceed all measurement. We can never measure the depth of their meaning, the height of their excellence, or the length of their duration. They cover the whole of life from the cradle to the grave. God's promises exceed all experience. Regardless of how many years a person has known the Lord, he has never exhausted God's promises, and he never will. The scope of these promises is as wide as the needs of men.

"Precious promise God hath given
To the weary passerby,
On the way from earth to heaven,
"I will guide thee with Mine eye."

"When temptations almost win thee,
And thy trusted watchers fly,
Let this promise ring within thee,
"I will guide thee with Mine eye."

"When thy secret hopes have perished
In the grave of years gone by,
Let this promise still be cherished,
"I will guide thee with Mine eye."

"When the shades of life are falling,
And the hour has come to die,
Hear the trusty Pilot calling,
"I will guide thee with Mine eye."

"I will guide thee, I will guide thee,
I will guide thee with Mine eye;
On the way from earth to heaven,
I will guide thee with Mine eye."