

# Liberating Promises

by John Piper

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*The sermon emphasizes the connection between knowledge and grace, and the goal of godliness and eternal life, highlighting the importance of divine power and humility.*

**Duration:** 38:10

**Scripture:** 2 Peter 1:1

**Topics:** "Promises"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of power, promises, practice, and prospect in the Christian life. He explains that when we experience the power of God and see His glory, sin has no hold on us. The promises and knowledge of God have the power to transform us and help us escape the power of sin and become like God. The preacher encourages daily engagement with the Scriptures, searching for promises that can guide and motivate us to live righteously. He also highlights that the battle against sin is fought on the level of desires and urges listeners to rely on the power of God's promises to overcome temptation.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) This morning's text is found in 2 Peter, the first chapter, verses 1 through 11. 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.

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and goodness, 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 and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness, and to goodness knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

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. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, brothers, 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. We begin this morning a series of expository messages on the second epistle of Peter, and my aim in these messages is very simply to move verse by verse through this three-chapter epistle, explaining what it means and applying it to our lives today. And I have two convictions that lie behind this decision to preach on this book and in this way.

One is that life is very short, and sermons are very few compared with lots of the other influences in life, and therefore I do well to keep my words as close to God's words as possible, since it's only his words that are going to make any difference in the long run. And I believe that this letter is the word of God for us here at Bethlehem today, and I don't want to try to imitate second Peter and play the apostle. I simply want to submit myself to this letter and deliver it, as it were, to you.

Unfold it, not copy it. I only want to help you understand the voice of God that I believe is here. And my second conviction underlying this decision is that through knowledge of this letter, or the glory and the excellency of God that is contained in this letter, we will be morally and spiritually transformed and granted a share in life eternal.

And I believe that because that's what our text this morning is going to teach, and I've experienced it that way. I really believe that if we saturate our life together as a congregation and our minds with this word in second Peter for the next ten weeks or so, that there's going to be an explosion, an explosion of worship and of love for one another and of compassion for the world and of harvest at Bethlehem. Now, my procedure as we begin will not be to begin with an overview, which might be helpful.

I'd rather start by just moving inductively, as we call it, a piece at a time and letting the overarching picture of the total message of the letter emerge little by little. And in that way, you're less dependent on me for my construction of what it's all about and more dependent on the text as we look at it together. And I really want you to be dependent on the text and not me.

And for that reason, I urge you in these next weeks to bring your Bibles. If you don't customarily bring a Bible and just listen, it'll be helpful to bring one because moving through a text verse by verse and talking about the phrases and the words and how they fit together is easier to follow if you look at a Bible. And I know there's only enough Bibles in those pews for about every five or six people, so don't count on those.

And if you miss a Sunday in the series, there'll always be the typescripts there the next Sunday that you can get for 25 cents, or you can get the tape two weeks later. So if you want to maintain the sequence and know what the book is all about, then why don't you try to stay up with us in that way if you have to be away? Let's begin at verse one. Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.

Just a brief word about authorship of this letter. Says to be by Peter. There's been a controversy ever since this letter first appeared on the scene whether in fact it was written by the apostle Peter.

And I'd love to take an hour and a half to talk about the authorship and date of this letter, but I don't think that belongs on Sunday morning, and I don't want to interrupt our series on Sunday evening. So I think what I'm going to do is every time we run up against a little technical issue like this, I'm going to write a little article in the Star about it. So if you're interested in that sort of question, then keep your eyes peeled.

I'll talk about the authorship of Peter in the Star this week. My general conviction is something like this. Even if Peter didn't actually put the words on paper, I think his authority and his agency or his authority

and commission lies behind it.

A number of the books in the New Testament we know were written by secretaries or amanuensis, as they're called. And it might be, I'm going to suggest this in the Star, that Jude was Peter's penman. And hence, the language of this letter is so different from 1 Peter and so like Jude.

And there are other reasons for why that might be the case as well. But however it comes down, I stand on this point that the first sentence of the letter can be taken at face value. At least Peter's voice and authority lies behind this letter, whether he was the one putting the words on the paper or not.

So I'm going to talk about Peter said this and Peter said that. And you don't have to think I'm playing games. Now, how does he introduce himself? I think this is very important and has implications for our understanding of ourselves and our understanding of ministry.

Servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. You all know that the word apostle, of course, carries a great deal of authority for those early Christians. It means a spokesman or representative of the living Christ.

When the apostles speak in their official capacity as teachers in the early church, Jesus Christ is speaking with all his authority. So it's a very high, lofty claim that Jesus or that Peter makes for himself here. But the emphasis of this verse is not on that.

The emphasis of the verse is on humility because he puts the word servant or slave first. And that softens, as it were, that first word apostle. There's a vast difference, isn't there, between a master's ambassador and a master's slave? And Peter pictures himself as both.

And we hold that kind of tension in our lives, don't we? And he puts the lowly one first so that that colors the rest of the the verse. It's a humbling or a humbled verse. I think he did the same thing in first Peter, chapter five, verse one, where he writes to the elders and says, I write to you as a fellow elder.

Paul did the same thing in Second Corinthians, chapter one, verse twenty four, where he said, not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy. The apostles knew and they learned this from Jesus, hadn't they, that one ought not to use God given authority to elevate oneself over another as a dictator, but to put oneself under others for their service. Here's what Jesus said.

The kings of the Gentiles lorded over them, those in authority call themselves benefactors. Not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest and let the leader.

As him who serves and Peter learned his lesson well. Now, reading on in the rest of the first verse, I think the emphasis is carried right on through to those who have obtained a faith with equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Isn't the point of that to say we're all on the same spiritual plane, brothers? I'm writing as an apostle, but if we share the same faith in Jesus Christ's righteousness, we're on a level ground and I'm not up here above you and you're not down there below me.

And that he had learned from Jesus, too, because you remember when Jesus sent out the 70, among whom was Peter, he said, or when they returned, he said, behold, I have given you authority. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven like all the other believers. And Peter had learned his lesson well, I think that and we should now apply it to ourselves.

No matter what authority in the church or in the world Christ has invested you with, the thing you should get excited about is that you're saying just like everybody else is saved by grace through faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Now, let me point out three other things in this second half of verse one, which I think stress the spiritual equality of believers before God. First, you can see very readily that little phrase, a faith of equal standing or as the King James has it so beautifully like precious faith.

Second, that little word obtained to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing. That's a very rare word. It occurs three other places in the New Testament and in every place it refers not to an obtaining by effort or earning, but to an obtaining by the choice of lots, drawing straws, rolling dice.

Which means that I think he chose that word to say we did obtain faith, but it wasn't through any great effort of our own. It was a gift of God. It was doled out to us, as it were.

Third, he emphasizes the equality of all believers by showing us that what makes us distinct or gives value to our faith is not our righteousness, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ, our God and Savior. Jesus, it says we have faith in or by depending on what version you have, the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. And that might mean that his righteousness is the means by which God effected our faith, or it might mean that the righteousness is the object of our faith, the thing in which we trust.

But in both cases, whichever it means, and it's very hard to decide. The point is the same. We depend and rely not on ourselves and our own righteousness.

We rely on the righteousness of one outside ourselves, Jesus Christ, our God and our Savior. So we can never boast in our faith. We can never elevate one above the other in terms of faith or before God because we've obtained it as a gift and because its value comes not from us, the believer, but from the object or the source of our faith, the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, all of verse one, I think, in every detail has this point. Brothers, I don't want to exalt myself over you. I want to come on as an authority, but as a brother standing beside you, serving you, helping you.

Now, the application of that to me as a pastor, of course, is clear, but I think it has application to us all. In a word, it would be something like this. Take heed, lest your position go to your head and you forget that you are slave as well as pastor.

You are slave as well as deacon. You are slave as well as trustee. You are slave as well as superintendent or teacher.

You are slave as well as doctor, lawyer, supervisor, whatever in this world or in the church might tend to elevate us and exalt us so that we would put ourselves over other people and look down on them. We must remember first slave and then a position of authoritative service, more or less. I think that will guard us from lots of lots of tension, lots of idolatry and lots of abuses in the church.

Verse two. May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus, our Lord. Now, you might be tempted to say, well, that's just a run of the mill introductory phrase.

I don't think it is, and the reason I don't think it is, is because at the end of the letter, look at chapter three, verse 18, at the end of the letter, the very same theme and connection of words is sounded. Chapter three, verse 18, he closes making this appeal grow in grace, which is the same as grace be multiplied and knowledge, which is the same as in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Those aren't

throwaway words.

This is not a trite formula that Peter has learned to begin letters with. That is what he's after in the church. He wants to see grace abounding in the lives of the people, and he knows that it comes through knowledge.

I think that's the most important thing to see in verse to the connection between knowledge and grace, grace and peace. And the connection, as you can see, is that we we receive grace or grace is multiplied to us in or through or by knowledge of God. Peter can't even get beyond his second sentence until he tips his hand and shows us what this letter is really about.

And we'll see this in verses three and four that this is already the point of the epistle. If you want to enjoy God's peace and be the aroma of his grace in the world, you must grow in grace. God must multiply his grace to you.

And notice that grace here is not a deposit, a static thing that you receive at conversion. It's a power that leads to godliness and life. And where there is knowledge of God, that grace can flow, that power can flow.

The channel that comes from the reservoir of God's grace flows down into life and power. And new godliness is knowledge, according to verse to the knowledge of God. Now, in the next two verses, that is all unpacked for us, spelled out in more detail, the connection between knowledge and the power of grace.

So let's read verse three. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to or lead to life and godliness through the knowledge. See the connection through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.

Now, there are three very distinct parts to that verse. The goal is that we obtain life and godliness. The source of that life and godliness is divine power.

And third, the means that connects divine power and godliness is the knowledge of the one who called us to his own glory and excellence. So let's take those three things, just look at them briefly one at a time. Peter is aiming at a goal here, two things.

And I think he means by life, eternal life and by godliness, practical everyday godliness, which we'll define in just a moment. Moral and spiritual transformation now and life eternal in the age to come. We're going to find in chapter two of this letter, which gets very fierce, by the way, and scares people away, I think, from preaching on this letter.

But we'll try it anyway. What we're going to discover in chapter two is that Peter is very concerned with moral corruption that has come into the church. And he sees a close connection between corruption or ungodliness and eternal life.

If one is rejected, so is the other. Look at chapter two, verses 19 and 20. Chapter two, verses 19 and 20.

He's speaking now concerning the false teachers that have come in and are spreading wrong things in the church. They promise them freedom. They promise the church freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption for whatever overcomes a man to that he is enslaved.

For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world through knowledge of our Lord, see the connection again through knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered. The last state has become worse for them than the first. In other words, if a person rejects the way of godliness, he rejects eternal life.

That's the implication of those verses, and I think that's why they belong together in verse three of chapter one. And therefore, what Peter is doing in this verse is forbidding that we turn our faith into a fire insurance policy to guard us from hell while staying the same in this life. It cannot be done according to this letter, and I think the rest of the New Testament as well.

The second part of verse three, the way of godliness and the hope of eternal life do not lie within our power to produce. They must be given to us by divine power. That's the source from which this new godliness is going to come from.

God's divine power has granted to us, given to us all things that pertain or lead to life and godliness. And that is a very humbling sentence, isn't it? When it comes to life and godliness, we have to get everything from outside. God's got to give it by his power, but that doesn't make us passive in the process.

Paul made it very clear. Work out your salvation for God is at work in you. God is giving you that power for godliness.

It doesn't mean we're passive. We do work, but it does imply that we could never be godly or attain unto eternal life if divine power were not flowing into our hearts. And I want to pause here now and stress this for our life together.

Christianity or the Christian faith is more than ascribing to a set of doctrines. It is disturbing to me, which happened recently, when I ask a person, do you know the Lord? And they start listing for me the things they believe about the Lord. Because I have to remind them then, as I did, the most orthodox persons under heaven are the devils.

They believe every doctrine and they are not saved. Believing doctrines in your head does not save. Brothers and sisters, and you know that well, and we need to remind ourselves of it again and again, so that when we're asked, do you know the Lord? We don't say, I believe that he's the son of God.

I believe that he died on the cross for sins. I believe that, that, that, that, that. The devil could answer on his form very similarly.

Christianity is not ascribing to doctrines merely. It is power, divine power. We are not saved by that ascription.

We are saved by divine power. Paul said, all who are led by the spirit of God, these are the sons of God, which is the same thing I think Peter is saying here. And the mark of that divine power is godliness.

And therefore, we have to take heed, lest we're deceiving ourselves, thinking that because we come to church and ascribe doctrines, that we are Christ's. It is more. Now, Peter says that divine power has been granted to us.

Who is this us? Verse one, of course, gave the answer, didn't it? He's writing to all who have obtained a faith of like standing with ours. Power is given to those who rely on Christ's righteousness, really rely lean,

heavy on the righteousness of Christ rather than their own. Now, the third important thing to ask about this verse three is how? What's the channel? What's the link up between this mighty power and this new behavior of godliness that we're called to? And the answer that he gives is through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.

Just as in verse two, grace is multiplied in the knowledge of God. So in verse three, power is granted through the knowledge of God. And that gives us a good definition of grace, by the way.

Grace is the power of God working in us for our good, which we don't deserve. It's not a static thing. And the way it becomes active, according this verse, is through knowledge, knowledge of God.

And one particular fact about God, that he has called us to glory and excellence. Now, that is not a mere fact in your head if you know it as something addressed to you personally. Suppose you were a prisoner of war in a concentration camp.

You had given up hope and having given up hope, given up morality. And then one day you hear a rumor that an exchange is being arranged, a prisoner exchange. Some are going to be released, go back to their families.

And you see the guard coming down the row pointing to people, summoning them out to be included in the exchange. And he gets in front of you and he points at you and says, you're included. Now, you hear it with your ears and it goes into your head and you register it.

That's a doctrine. That's true. I have now been called.

But it's more. It is power. It is the power of hope flowing into that hopeless life.

And everything changes. Everything changes. The power for morality returns.

Joy returns. Peace returns. Everything returns when the knowledge that you've been pointed at and called to freedom is taken into your heart.

And I think, therefore, we ought to be able to understand what Peter means when he says that knowing that God called us to glory is what channels power into godliness. You've all experienced that, haven't you? I'm sure you have in one measure or the other, that those times when you have seen God most clearly and his glory has shined most brightly and you have been most excited about your future, you felt power for godliness. Sin's been like water off a duck's back to you at those times.

It has no claim. And the times when sin is powerful are just the opposite times, when God grows dim and our call is doubtful and we don't see his glory. The power of hope and the power of godliness come from seeing and knowing the glorious excellency of God.

Verse four. I think all verse four does is restate, in other words, verse three. See if you see the connection.

By which, now that which refers to the glory and excellence of God. You can tell that in Greek because it's plural. You can't tell it in English because which can be singular or plural.

By which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises that through these, you might escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion and become partakers of the divine nature. That's the same point as verse three, isn't it? Only what's happening is the knowledge of verse three is

being explained as promises in verse four. And the godliness of verse three is being interpreted in verse four as escape from corruption and likeness to God.

And so what we learn is that the only knowledge of God that gives power is promising knowledge. Not just dead, dry knowledge that has nothing to do with me, but promising knowledge, knowledge that holds out hope and promise for my life and communicates to me a happy prospect of the future. Makes me know I'm included.

I've got to be included if it's going to make a difference. Suppose you're a little child. Now, I've seen this happen a number of times.

You have been sick and it's been gloomy all week, raining outside. And you wake up on Saturday morning and the sun is shining and it's 70 degrees already at eight o'clock after all this rain that happened this weekend. Now, that sunshine gives power to that little child spirit.

You see it change. But only if he's well by Saturday morning. Only if he's included when he hears the voices playing in the backyard.

If he's got to stay inside while everybody else is out there playing, the sunshine gives no hope. It gives no glory. It gives no godliness.

And so in the Christian life, you can't just know that there's glory out there somewhere. You got to be included. You got to know that the address is to you.

Hey, you're included. God has walked down the prisoner of war path and said, I want you to come with me. You're going to go.

Then it's got power. And I think that's the way we have to think about the promises of God and the knowledge of God. All our learning, all our study for the Bible is not an end in itself.

It's to get promising, hopeful knowledge that has power to transform us. And I think that's very, very significant. The godliness of verse three is spelled out for us now.

I think in verse four, negatively and positively. There are two things that are more important than anything else in all the world for us. One is to escape from the power of sin that corrupts and destroys life.

And the other is positively to become like God and to share in his nature. And this verse, praise the Lord, tells us how to do it, how to become like that. And the answer is we find liberation from sin and likeness to God by knowing and trusting the precious and very great promises of the Lord.

Now, very practically, I'll tell you how I think that works for me and how I think it should work for you. It means that day by day, you ought to get up in the morning and not just kind of mechanically read 18 verses or four pages or whatever you're working on, but search those scriptures for a promise. You got to go away with a promise in your head and hang it out there in front of you like a big carrot before your nose and let it draw you into paths of righteousness all day long, because that's the only way you're going to overcome the temptations to sin.

Notice this last phrase of verse four that says the corruption that's in the world comes by passion or by desire or by lust. Now, what that means is the battle against sin and temptation is fought on the level, on the plane of desires. Not at the intellectual plane first, it's fought at the plane of desires, which means that

you got to fight desire with desire.

Isn't it true that the way sin allures you and tempts you to follow it is by promising you things? Happiness, for example, lie on your income tax and you'll have more money and you'll be happier. Divorce your husband and you'll get out of that problem and you'll be happier. Drink your worries away and you'll be happier.

Don't upset the relationship with your neighbor by sharing Christ and risking his animosity and you'll be happier. Sin offers happiness and therefore has power. Unless we got a big carrot hanging out in front of our nose that is much more luscious than any of the little thorn bushes of sin that offer themselves along the way.

You see how the promises give power to overcome sin during the day? But they won't if you do like I so often do kind of get up and mechanically read the Bible and say, well, I put in my 20 minutes or so and you go on and you're out on the street walking to work and you remember there was nothing. I don't have anything in my head that's hopeful. I don't have anything in my head to sustain me today.

I just read words. So I urge you search for promises, luscious, very great, big carrot like promises. And if you don't like carrots, hang something else out there.

Just replace the image with grapefruit or popcorn or chocolate bars. Anything that will lead you in the way of righteousness and cause all those other suggestions to just be like little water off a duck's back. No claim on you at all.

So I sum up with four words what I think this whole text is about power, promises, practice and prospect. And here's where they're connected. God's divine power has been given to us and it flows through the channel of promises as we know them in our heads and lean on them and trust them with our hearts.

And flowing that power flowing through promises produces new practice called godliness, which means loving the ways of God and walking in them. And that leads to the prospect of eternal life, life and godliness. And I commend to you prayer and searching the scriptures that we might not just know that there's promise, that there's power out there, but might feel it surging through us for ministry every day.

Now, may the grace and the peace and the godliness and the life of God be multiplied to you all through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. We invite you to visit Desiring God online at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). There you'll find hundreds of sermons, articles, radio broadcasts and much more all available to you at no charge.

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