

Week 2 - God's Gifts Through Christ - 2Peter 1:3-4

Scripture Reading: James 1:16-18

Introduction

What is the best present you ever received not including salvation itself?

When our youngest daughter was really small, we gave her a present of a pair of stuffed Dalmatian dogs

This was when 101 Dalmatians had just come out for her generation and she was beyond thrilled

The expression of pure ecstatic joy and delight at having received them set the bar for gifts in the Lincoln household

Ever since that day, we have referred to the ultimate gift as a "Dalmatian gift"

We couldn't find the original "Dalmatian gift" photo but here is a picture of her son, Will, when he opened the package containing those same stuffed dogs when we mailed them down to them - like mother like son I guess

This morning, we are going to see that God has given his children great gifts that could all be called Dalmatian gifts

Remember, in this letter, Peter is addressing false teachers from within the ranks of the church

And his purpose in writing is to encourage and arm his readers so that they can effectively defend themselves against them

And he will focus on the false teachers for quite a bit of the letter but the false teachers are merely the *impetus* for the letter while his *emphasis* is to make certain his readers have a solid foundation from which to resist the false teachers

Remember last week we said the big idea of 2 Peter is:

Diligent growth in the true knowledge of Christ protects us against destructive false teaching and prepares us to persevere in godliness while we wait for his promised return

To that end, verses 3-4 reveal how God has graciously equipped his people with good gifts through Christ

Gifts that function as faith's firm foundation as we grow in the knowledge of Christ and who we are in Christ

Verses 3-4 serve as the introduction to a brief opening sermon that runs through verse 11 and as a kind of thesis statement for the entire letter as in them we see that what God has given us is utterly sufficient

God's grace is sufficient enough to justify us, to sanctify us, to glorify us, and it's also sufficient to allow us to handle life's difficulties, hardships, and tribulations

If you are taking notes; that is the first point on your sheet:

I. God's gifts to us are special

I want to point out three characteristics of God's sufficient gifts: their source, their supply, and their selectivity

First, we see that God's gifts are sufficient because of their **source**

Verse 3 tells us that [**2Peter 1:3a**] the spiritual sufficiency we have is not because of anything we possess in ourselves but because it comes from God's divine power

He writes: "*His divine power has granted to us...*" with the "His" referring to Jesus which explains the adjective "divine" being used as another reminder that Jesus is of the same precise nature as God the Father

In **Ephesians 3:20**, the apostle Paul spoke of this truth by saying:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us

And, as we heard in our Scripture reading from James, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above*"

The Greek word behind our English "power" means the ability to perform a particular activity

And Paul uses this word in 2Corinthians 1:8 where it is translated “strength” as he speaks of the limited capacity he and his fellow ministers experienced in Asia as they underwent trials there

All humans are likewise limited in strength or power but God’s power is unlimited - God is omnipotent

Think of the amazing truth we are looking at here; God’s omnipotence is at work for us and in us and it isn’t restricted by our limitations

At the moment you were saved, God generously and graciously granted or gave his power to you as a gift and God’s own power is available to you permanently

The **second** characteristic we want to notice about God’s gifts is their **supply**

We see that in the middle part of verse 3 [**2Peter 1:3b**] God has granted us “*all things that pertain to life and godliness*”

I wonder how many Christmases and birthdays have been spoiled by the three little overlooked words “Batteries not included” that made what was supposed to be a special gift unusable

And how often have we been disappointed to find that the picture on the box contained accessories that weren’t included but could be purchased separately?

Sadly, many people have been led to believe that something was left out of their salvation experience and that more is needed for them to be truly and fully spiritual

Whether that something is a second baptism of the Spirit, a demonstration of certain spiritual gifts or special insights and knowledge, many believe there are “second blessings” that a true Christ-follower must experience

But look at what Peter says here - God’s provision at the moment of salvation is “all things” that we need to live godly lives

And that means just what you would expect it to mean

God has provided us with everything we need to grow in grace and Christ-likeness and to live the life of a Christ-follower

There are no exceptions and we lack nothing that we need

This is a good time to mention a matter of vital importance -

What Peter says here has nothing at all to do with humanity in general, but rather describes what God had given to his people - to those who are true followers of his Son

And I mention that because scholars debate what precisely Peter meant when he used the word “life”

Some say he is speaking of eternal life and some say it is natural life as opposed to death and others argue that Peter is speaking of an ethical sense of life

But when we recognize that Peter is only speaking of the benefits that accrue to believers, all those problems go away

See, we have the tendency to think of eternal life as a *quantity* of life but it is also a *quality* of life and, as such, our eternal life begins the moment we accept Christ - though perhaps not perfectly for as long as we live in these bodies

And the life that Peter is talking about is the life that God intended every person to enjoy - the ethical, abundant, god-pleasing life - but that kind of life can only be lived by someone who is trusting in Christ for salvation

But we also see that a true follower of Christ has a duty to live a life of godliness - which is to say “God-likeness”

As Pastor John Piper put it, “If the way of godliness is rejected so is the hope of eternal life. So Peter forbids us to turn our faith into a fire insurance policy for escaping hell while our lives remain unchanged. The hope of life and the way of godliness stand or fall together.”

We should not ask God for anything more to become godly individuals because he has already given us all we need to begin, sustain, and perfect godly living

And that also means we have no excuse for not living godly lives

And that brings us to our **third** characteristic of God's gifts - their **selectivity**

Look with me at the last part of verse 3 where Peter reveals how God's power is made available

He writes that it's [2Peter 1:3c] *"...through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence"*

The "knowledge" that Peter has in mind here is the same personal knowledge from verse 2 which we looked at last week - the knowledge that results in salvation and not merely the knowledge of facts

And the knowledge that leads to salvation is not the product of human inquiry or speculation, although those activities may play a role, but rather it is the result of the divine initiative

Jesus himself taught in **John 6:44** - *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."*

The call to salvation is always seen in the Bible as a divine act even though a human agent is typically utilized

Once again, there is some scholarly debate surrounding the word translated as "to" in our ESV Bibles because the Greek word can also be translated as "by"

So we are left to determine whether this action was done *by* Jesus' glorious excellence or *for* his glorious excellence

A third option is that Peter meant to indicate that we are called "to" the same glory and excellence as Christ like we saw him do in **1Peter 5:10** when we looked at that verse a few weeks ago

I tend to lean toward a combination and believe that Peter means that it's because of Christ's honor that we have been called to an equal status of honor and, of course, Christ is honored further in the process

And that understanding helps make better sense out of verse 4 which we will turn our attention to in a moment

The point is, we were called into our knowledge of him; it was not really our discovery, regardless of how it might seem to us, and our calling came on the basis of his achievement, his excellence, and his honorable nature, not ours

Yet because of his honor we have been called into an honorable status

Looking at verse 4 we see that:

II. God's promises to us are valuable

Peter writes in verse 4 [2Peter 1:4]:

...by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Of course the "by which" indicates that it's through his glory and excellence that Jesus has given us the promises mentioned

Again, the term "granted" is in the perfect tense which means it is a past action that has ongoing effects

Promises then, just as they are now, were sometimes no more than words so the affirmation that these are promises that have been fulfilled is a testimony to God's faithfulness

And, as we will see, that was one of the avenues the heretics were seeking to exploit by making Peter's readers doubt that God was going to come through as he said

And Peter tells us that the promises we have been granted are "precious and very great"

God's promises are valuable and honorable but we aren't told the exact content of the promises Peter has in mind

We could speculate but it seems better to simply accept that Peter is generally referencing those things that are promised to believers when they are saved and to leave it at that

After all, Peter's focus in our passage isn't on the content of the promises themselves but on the results of them

And he points out that through these promises the follower of Jesus Christ gains two benefits

The first benefit listed is stated as a positive (participation in the divine nature) and the second is a negative (escape from the corruption that is caused by evil desires)

Let's take them in turn

A "partaker" is a partner or a sharer of something - in this case that something is the divine nature

So we can understand Peter's meaning to be that Christ-followers share some part of God's nature

Something that makes us more like the world of the divine than the world of human beings

Again, we could speculate as to what characteristics Peter has in mind here but let's look the negative benefit first to see if it sheds any light on the positive one

In Greek cosmology there was a dualism between the divine realm and the world that was expressed in terms of immortality versus mortality, incorruption versus corruption, permanence versus change, and so forth

The divine world was above all change, including the changes implied in death and the corruption that occurs after death

And the Greek word Peter uses that is translated as "corruption" means disintegration and falling apart denoting an organism decomposing

Still, Peter isn't promoting the dualistic thinking of the Greeks because he knew that corruption isn't in the world because the world is material and not spiritual

He knew that corruption is in the world because of desire as he states here

The word "desire" means to long for or to want something very much and, contrary to what we see in most English translations, there is no adjective attached to it - the original Greek doesn't say "sinful" desire but merely "desire"

Desires can be good but desire can also drive a person to sin and the battle against corruption is fought on the field of desire

Also, our nature determines our appetite, as Warren Wiersbe put it, so having a new nature should indicate new desires

And since Peter says that desire is the cause of the corruption of the world we naturally assume that the desire he is speaking of would be sinful desire - immoral desire that leads to the world's decay

And Peter doesn't say that the Christ-follower escapes from the world or from physical existence, which would be more in line with the Greek way of thinking, but from the corruption of the world

He is speaking of an ethical escape that has a spiritual result

Meaning that one has made a successful escape from the effects of their fallen nature, the sinful tendencies of the world, and the destruction that will result

Paul says it this way in **Romans 6:12-14** –

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Paul is indicating that sin is an 'inside job' and sin, including passions or lusts or sinful desires, will try to dominate. But God has granted us his promises so that we can become partakers of the divine nature so that they cannot gain a foothold in us and we can escape their corrupting influence.

And while we have effectively received that escape we must still act on that truth and put it into practice in our daily choices so that we act in accordance with our position.

This again is an already but not yet and Peter isn't indicating any kind of chance here with the use of the word "may" but a certainty that is guaranteed though not fully completed in a practical sense.

We became full partners with Christ in his divine nature at the moment of our conversion but the reality is that we must, over time, be conformed more and more to his image so as to experience it fully.

After all those who claim to be completely free from sin and desire in this life usually are deceived and having a realistic view that escape is more of a process called sanctification results in a healthy humility and watchfulness.

And when our spirits are united with our spiritual bodies in glory we will then possess eternal life and the divine nature in perfect holiness and dwell in a new heaven and a new earth where sin and corruption no longer exist in fact.

Now back to Peter's meaning of becoming "partakers of the divine nature"

Since this escape from corruption in the world is ethical and because it parallels the partaking of the divine nature it should be understood that the character of the divine nature Peter has in mind must also be ethical in nature.

And the fact that Peter is speaking in terms of ethics regarding the divine nature fits well with the overall theme of the letter where his readers will be battling against false teachers.

It makes sense that he would want to assure them that they possess an ethical nature like God's that results in incorruptibility as well as immortality.

Conclusion

No one, including Peter, has ever said that living a godly life in this corrupt world was going to be easy - it will always be a struggle.

Peter's point in these two verses is that God has given us everything that we need to live a godly life by virtue of knowing his Son and by trusting his marvelous promises.

Everything we need to endure and overcome is available to us.

The source of the gifts is sufficient because they come from God's unlimited power.

And the supply of the gifts is unending because they come from God's unlimited stock.

So, if you don't feel you have what you need it's either because you don't understand the resources that are yours through God's graciousness or they aren't yours because you truly aren't his.

Remember, God's gifts are also selective so each person needs to make sure that they are indeed God's person through having true, personal knowledge of Christ.

Still, gifts and promises are funny things because their value is only potential until they are accepted and put to use.

If our daughter had left the package containing those Dalmatians unopened she, and we, would never have experienced the true joy of them.

In that case, the benefit of the gift would have been proffered but never possessed.

Many Christ-followers struggle through life because they have never truly accepted and put to use what is theirs from God's gracious hand.

And the power of the gifts that God has given to them remains in the potential column.

The same thing is true when it comes to promises

A promise is like a check - which is sometimes called a promissory note - it's a written promise to pay

But let's assume that, upon receiving a check, you determine that it is simply a piece of paper and you don't accept its value so you never even attempt to cash it so as to receive what is rightfully yours to use

Who would be to blame for your lack?

If you were to receive a promise from another person you would assess their character and their ability to keep it

And God's promises are as sure to be fulfilled as his unchanging character and his power to keep them

But there are two very important questions you need to answer regarding God's promises

First, do you know what God has promised?

If not, I recommend you search God's Word and learn as much as you can about what God has said he will do

Be sure you know what is written on the check

Second, do you trust God's promises?

Too many Christ-followers live in a state of non-anticipation never really expecting God to do the things he has promised

They fail to look at God's unblemished record when it comes to promises and so they have no confidence that God will do for them as he has said he will and so they miss out on much of God's favor in this life

It's been estimated that there are some 30,000 of God's promises in the Bible

Not all of them will apply to you directly but many of them will and we see God's record of promise making and promise keeping in each of them whether they apply directly to us or not

All of God's power is available to us so that we can go through daily life in a way that pleases God

In fact, he called us so that through knowing his Son he might make us into the kind of men and women he has always intended us to be

And he promises to do so

Let's pray

James 1:16-18 (page 1011)

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.