

The Effective Life

2 Peter 1:2-9

April 22-23, 2017

This is the second of Peter's letters and it's the last of his letters. He knows his time here is coming to an end so, in many ways, these are his last words. There is a sense of urgency to what he writes. At this point, the church is under heavy persecution and he writes to strengthen their faith and help them to live the victorious, effective life that God intends.

Last words have great significance. Some last words are interesting; Gen. John Sedgwick was in a battle in the Civil War and his last words were, "They couldn't kill an elephant at this distance." Groucho Marx, ever the comedian, said, "This is no way to live!" A priest came to the bedside of the famous playwright, Wilson Mizner, and said, "I'm sure you want to talk to me." Mizner responded to the priest, "Why should I want to talk to you? I was just talking to your boss."

Martyn Lloyd Jones, famous pastor and writer, said, "Don't pray for healing; don't hold me back from the glory." DL Moody's last words were, "Earth recedes, heaven opens before me! If this is death, it is sweet. God is calling me; I must go."

Peter's last words were written to believers in Asia Minor to stir them up to stronger faith. They needed stronger faith to live the effective, victorious life because their faith was under attack. The Roman

Emperor, Nero, decided that Christians had to be eliminated and set about on an empire wide persecution.

The church was also under spiritual attack as false teachers, loaded with distorted, destructive heresies, were trying to put a religious cover over worldly and fleshly sensuality.

Peter's letter is straightforward, straight up, and powerfully effective *in stirring us* up to live the effective Christian life God is calling us to live because our Christian faith is also under attack from without and within. However, at the same time, difficult times also purify the church.

I read an interesting article this week, written by Lee Strobel, author of *The Case for Christ*. He was once a staunch atheist whose wife became a Christian. At first, he thought to divorce her; instead, he decided to attack Christianity and debunk it; proving it to be false so he could get his wife back. He was a law-trained journalist for the *Chicago Tribune* so he set about researching like the investigative journalist he was.

Instead of debunking Christianity, however, he encountered persuasive evidence he couldn't refute and concluded that maintaining his atheism required more faith than becoming a believer. He ended up becoming a pastor and writer.

The point he writes in the article is this; when people say God isn't relevant in the 21st century, he begs to differ. When analysts predict the decline of the evangelical church, he rolls his eyes. He's seen the surveys where people profess no religious affiliation, but from his perspective, that only means that people are now willing to be more honest. There used to be social pressure for people to claim they're religious, now it's socially acceptable to be an atheist or a skeptic. That's good, he says, it's better to be honest. Now, when people receive Christ, they can do it for the right reasons-- because they believe and they have taken hold of God's promises with an honest heart.

There are vibrant ministries helping the hurting, feeding the hungry, rescuing addicts, putting broken families back together. In the church, there is racial reconciliation. There is a growing movement of vibrant, biblically faithful churches that are thriving and even burgeoning. There are many young people, fed up with the materialistic, celebrity-saturated, empty culture of our day and authentically pursuing faith.

In other words, yes, it is possible to live a victorious, vibrant Christian life even in a troubled and broken down world.

I. God Grants Us What We Need

- Verse 3 – God has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.
- God sent His Son to seek and to save that which was lost. He delights to take people with messed up lives and to transform them so they have life and life to the full.
- You know the Nike slogan, “Just do it”? That’s not God’s slogan. He changes you *so that* you can do it. He doesn’t just say, “Do this or do that,” He changes you from the inside so you have the power to do what He is asking you to do.

A. God’s divine power is on the move

- I mentioned last week that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you.
- In other words, no man has the power to save himself and no man has the power to change himself.
- God’s divine power has granted to us everything we need to have spiritual life and godliness. He doesn’t say to you, “Just do it,” He says, “I’ll send My divine power and I’ll do it in you.”

Illus - I remember Pastor Chuck Smith telling us about a discussion he had with some of the leaders in China. They had asked him how Christianity was different from other religions. Chuck Smith answered, “God gives His Holy Spirit so that His people are changed by His power not their own.”

Philippians 4:12-13, I know how to get along with humble means and I know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

- But how? How to put this in the practical everyday living, that is the question.

B. Partake of God’s divine nature

- Verse 4 – by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature...
- What does it mean to partake of God’s divine nature? One thing it does not mean is that we become little gods with dominion over our own little planets out there somewhere.

- He's giving us the key to the transformed life. There will be no spiritual transformation unless you partake of God's divine nature. It's the very presence of God within the soul that transforms the messed-up life.
- That's the difference between religion and relationship. Religion is just the appearance of change without any actual change. It's just putting a religious robe over the same messed-up heart.

Illus - I used an illustration at the Wednesday service that helps us see his point. When Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took down the body of Jesus from the cross and prepared His body for burial, they brought 100 pounds of spices. Why did the Jews wrap dead bodies with spices? Because they stinketh. In other words, the best they can do to death is to cover it over with spices and perfume.

But God doesn't cover death with spices and perfume, he transforms death into life.

- If you don't partake of God's divine nature, then your only option is to cover death with spices. You're left with just religion; all you can do is put a religious robe over the same messed-up heart.

- Some people cover their spiritual death with good works, that's just the same as covering death with spices and perfume. You simply get spicy death!
- But if you want real change, God can do better than that. It's His divine nature in your soul that transforms you so that His life and His nature and His Spirit dwells within you. But you must partake.
- How generous of God to love us so much to not only save us, but also to ignite our soul and allow us to partake of His divine nature -- - having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.
- Corruption is death; it stinketh. It's what the world is made of and instead of just covering that corruption with spices and perfume, He's allowed us to partake of His divine nature and experience His life.
- How then does a person partake in God's divine nature?

C. Take hold of God's magnificent promises

- Verse 4 – For by these (His divine power through the true knowledge of Him) He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature.

- God, in His word, reveals His nature, but He also reveals His precious and magnificent promises. In other words, when you're hearing God's word, you're not just studying an interesting document, you're hearing promises that God is giving you.
- Promises are something you take hold of personally. You're standing on the promises when you take hold of them and live according to them.

Illus - If a father promises to take his son fishing, that's not just an interesting piece of information, the son takes hold of that promise. Sometimes we disappoint when we make a promise, but God never does.

Hebrews 10:23, Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

2 Timothy 2:13, If we are faithless, He remains faithful.

Illus - When Abraham had no children, God promised that he would have a son and would be the father of many nations. Through his descendant, all the nations on the earth would be blessed. He took hold of that promise and stood on it, he lived by it.

- God's promises to us are precious and magnificent and granted to us by His Son, Jesus Christ and are guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Hebrews 8:6, But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.

II. Live by God's Divine Nature

- Verse 5-8 - Peter describes what the transformed life looks like when you partake of the divine nature.
- The nature of something comes from the qualities that make it what it is.

Illus - A dog has a dog nature and does dogly things. A cat has a cat nature and does catly things. A dog climbs up on the bed because it likes to be with you; a cat climbs up on the bed because it likes your bed. A dog sees you as a friend, a cat sees you as a servant.

You were born with the nature of Adam; sinful, self-pleasing and self-focused. That nature leads to spiritual death. When you partake of God's divine nature, His nature will be seen in how you live. It's the only way to be truly transformed.

In other words, God doesn't have any self-help programs, He only has God-help programs.

Psalm 127:1-2, Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for it is He who gives to His beloved even while he sleeps.

A. These qualities make you useful and fruitful

- If you are partaking in the divine nature, then let the divine nature be lived out in your life. This is so important that Peter says to apply all diligence to this.

Illus - It's the sap in the tree that gives it life, without it, it's dead and it bears no fruit. If the Holy Spirit is in-filling and indwelling and you're opening your heart to God, then you are receiving of the very life of God within you. That will come out of your life as spiritual fruit, as the nature of God in your character.

- These qualities are the result of partaking in God's divine nature.
- Verse 5 – In your faith, supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence,

supply knowledge; and in your knowledge, supply self-control...

Illus - You can't supply these things in self-effort, no more than a tree can make itself bear fruit. It's only in abiding in Christ, partaking of God's divine nature that these qualities are yours.

- The reason transformation isn't happening in some people is because they're not partaking. The only way that food strengthens is if you eat it.

Illus – It's like going to the gym and then not doing anything, if you don't partake, there is no change.

- It's pretty difficult to see the fruit of the Holy Spirit without the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23, 25, The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control... If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

B. Never forget what God has done

- Verse 9 - he who lacks these qualities is blind or shortsighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.

- Never forget what God has done for you; always be thankful, it keeps the right perspective.

Colossians 3:15, 17, Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... and be thankful... Whenever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

- In Matthew 18 Jesus gives a parable of a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. One who owed 10,000 talents was brought to him. The servant fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, “Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.” The Lord of that servant felt compassion and released him and forgive him all the debt. But then that servant went out and found one of his fellow slaves to only owed him 100 dinner I; but he sees them and began to choke him, saying, “Pay back what you owe.”

Illus – What if the prodigal son went back to feeding pigs after he was so graciously received by his father?