

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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A Faithful People

2 Peter 1:3-15

Key verse: “His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Did you see the powerful World War II film, “Saving Private Ryan”? If so, you will remember that Captain Miller (played by Tom Hanks) dies on the battlefield, having helped save the life of Private Ryan. Captain Miller’s last words to Private Ryan are these: “Earn it.” At the end of the film, the now elderly Private Ryan returns to the military cemetery with his family. He stands in front of Captain Miller’s grave and reflects upon his own life and upon Miller’s sacrifice. Trembling and nearly overcome with emotion, Ryan turns to his wife and asks: “Have I led a good life? Am I a good man?”

Something in all of us makes us want our lives to count, to have meaning and purpose. We want to live “a good life.” Our definitions of the good life, however, vary widely. For many people, a good life means being a good person, morally. Sometimes this also means living a life characterized by self-effort and “works righteousness,” largely missing out on God’s *grace*.

For other people the “good life” does not require much at all in the way of personal morality. This second worldview was, in a way, that of the false teachers of Peter’s day. Most Bible scholars believe that 2 Peter was written to combat an early form of Gnosticism that had infiltrated the church. These false teachers taught that salvation came from possessing a secret, esoteric knowledge. For them, possession of this secret knowledge made personal morality irrelevant.

2 Peter 1:3-15 teaches that, for the Christian, the “good life” involves both a *saving knowledge of Christ* and a *changed life that reflects the character of Christ*. For the Christian, the good life starts by receiving God’s *transforming grace* in Christ. It also requires our active participation in developing a Christ-like character.

The “good” Christian life *begins* with saving faith that comes through the knowledge of Christ. “His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through our knowledge of him who called us....” (v. 3).

Through the knowledge of Christ and his “precious and very great promises,” we “become participants of the divine nature” (v. 4). This is what the writer of 2

Corinthians had in mind when he wrote: “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17). In the Christian worldview, this is where the “good life” starts—with the new birth.

Peter tells us that, through saving faith in Christ, we are changed and have—through the power of the indwelling Christ—“everything needed” to lead a Christ-like life. Another Tom Hanks film offers a glimpse into this truth of 1 Peter 1:3....

During Superbowl XXXVII, FedEx ran a commercial that spoofed the Hanks movie, “Castaway.” In that film, Hanks played a FedEx worker whose plane crashed, leaving him alone on a deserted island. In the commercial, Hanks’ character goes to the door of a home, just like the end of the movie. When the lady living there comes to the door, “Hanks” explains how he has kept a single package addressed to her during his five years on the island. He then asks her, “What was in that package after all?”

As the commercial ends, she opens the package and says: “Oh, nothing really. Just a satellite telephone, a global positioning device, a compass, a water purifier, and some seeds.”

Much like that package, the resources for Christian transformation and growth are available for every Christian who will use them. Peter calls those resources that are in us “His divine power” (v. 3).

So, the “good life” doesn’t come apart from God’s transforming grace, which we receive through faith in Christ. However, this faith must grow. As verse 5 tells us, the Christian must “make every effort to support” this faith with the character qualities listed in verses 5-7. Remember? *God’s transforming grace plus our active participation in developing Christ-like character.*

“The abundance of God is not passively received and does not happen to us by chance. The abundance of God is claimed and put into action by our active, intelligent pursuit of it. We must act in union with the flow of God’s kingdom life that comes through our relationship with Jesus. We cannot do this, of course, purely on our own. But we must act. Grace is contrasted with earning, but not with effort. Well directed, decisive, and sustained effort is the key to the keys of the kingdom and to the life of restful power in ministry” (Dallas Willard in “Taking God’s Keys,” *Leadership* - Fall 1998).

Bradley Nassif put it more succinctly: “Grace is opposed to merit, but it is not opposed to effort.”

So, Peter tell us, having received Christ by faith, we already have within us “everything needed for life and godliness.” We have the necessary resources to live the “good life.” Now, our growth in Christ requires our active participation. We are to “make every effort to support” our faith by developing the following character qualities:

“goodness” – meaning moral strength and integrity

“knowledge” – meaning spiritual discernment and practical wisdom

“self-control” – As Louis McBurney has said, “A common path to sexual sin is the notion that feelings are not only all-important but also totally uncontrollable; they just happen to you.”

“endurance” - through life’s challenges and temptations

“godliness” – which involves both a reverence for God and a right relationship with God

“mutual affection” - warmhearted affection for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ

“love” (*agape* in the New Testament Greek) – an unselfish, Christ-like love characterized by service

If these Christ-like character qualities are present and growing in us, Peter says, we will not be “ineffective and unfruitful” (v. 8).

Something in all of us makes us want to live a life of meaning and purpose. We want to know that our lives matter. At times we, like Private Ryan, will assess our lives and ask, “Have I led a good life?” The Good News of the Gospel is that we can have a positive answer to that question.

Living the good life doesn’t happen through our self-effort, apart from God’s grace. Living the good life does not come through religious knowledge apart from moral and spiritual life-change.

A good life—an abundant life—begins when we receive Christ into our lives by faith. That saving faith begins a life change as, through the new birth, we become “partakers of the divine nature.” Then, through the power of the indwelling Christ, we partner with God—praying, worshipping, serving—in order to develop Christ-like character qualities.

Through the transforming power of God’s grace and our active participation in the process of Christian growth, the “good life” can be ours! Thanks be to God.

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