

The Promises

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And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead when he was about an hundred years old neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform, - Rom. 4:19-21. Our views today reach beyond our text. It is not of Abraham's faith in the promises made to him that we mean to speak; but of the promises of God in general, and of the relation in which we stand to them. And, oh, may our contemplations on this all-important subject both console and enliven us! Let us direct our attention *to the promises themselves; let us then ask what we have to do with them; and, lastly, let us consider what we generally do.*

1, Who does not know that we live under a dispensation of promises? The divine promises include all that is good for us, and all that we could desire. The Christian life is based upon them, and they form the spring of our peace, our joy, our power, and our strength. The expectations with which we console ourselves, invigorate as like the breezes of the morning, and if we are happy, it is through hope. The ways through which we receive the divine promises are many and various; sometimes they come to us direct from heaven, and sometimes through the mouths of prophets and apostles. Often in the midst of our prayers they enter our hearts suddenly, like a salutation of love; a joy overpowers us, which we can compare to nothing else but an Amen uttered by our heavenly Father in answer to our requests; and with joyful countenances we arise from the ground, assured that our petition is already granted. At other times we receive the promises, by means of a certain joyful conviction: the cause of God and the honor of His name demand that certain events should take place; and we feel like David, who, when Goliath defied the armies of the living God, no longer doubted that Jehovah would transform the stone in his sling into an avenging thunderbolt to slay his enemy; or like Lt they, who, when his friends Melancthon and Mycobias lay in grievous sickness, and apparently at the point of death, was filled with the firm conviction that God could not and would not remove those men from His church, where a high destiny awaited them, and called out, as though inspired, "Ye shall not die, but live!" And thus it happened. A third way is that in which the pious F Hannah received the promise; when Eli the priest said unto her, "Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him." Or as David did, when Jonathan said unto him, "Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel." It often happens at present in a similar manner; a brother comes to visit us, who, during his own prayers, has felt his heart touched and moved on our account, and now brings us the joyful assurance, "Fear not! The Lord will remove thy sorrow." Beloved! The Lord can find means and ways enough to transmit the light of His promises through the darkness of our night: He daily shows Himself among His people as the living and present God-and converses with them no less than formerly, as one friend does with another.

Today, however, we speak less of those promises which come to us in such various manners, than of those which are contained in the sacred writings, and which, like a bright garland of stars, are interwoven through the book of life; or, like a countless multitude of benignant angels, smile upon us through the whole Bible, from the first book of Moses to the Revelation of John. These promises extend far above the clouds, and hold out palm branches of eternal triumph as a reward to the faithful, who strive for the kingdom of God. They hold out immortal crowns to us, even though the world trample us now under foot; they tell us of a home prepared for us in heaven

above, when we find the land of Meshech where we dwell too narrow for us; and they console us in the midst of every grief and calamity, with the assurance of a happiness which even that of the angels does not surpass. Yet those promises which raise our hopes above the stars, and which throw open the gates of paradise to the eyes of faith, are not those which we propose principally to contemplate at present; on the contrary, let us consider those which are to be fulfilled during time, and whose accomplishment we have already experienced or may yet experience. These, as you are aware, refer for the most part to the happiness of our souls, and to our spiritual life: and oh!, the blessed assurances which accompany us on our pilgrim's path, and enrapture us like a song heard in the night! My brethren, I beseech you, listen to what the mouth of truth has spoken. Remember that we can never be overcome, for no one can tear us out of the arms of Jesus; mountains may fall to pieces, but not the covenant of peace; hills may be moved from their places, but His grace will never remove from us. The divine seed which has been sown in our hearts will blossom everlastingly, and the Spirit of God will never be taken away from us. The Lord will protect us like the apple of His *eye*, and bear us up, as upon eagle's wings. The wicked shall not harm us, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against us. God will be with us during the fire of persecution, so that the flames may not consume us. He will stand by our side while the waves of despair and doubt assail us, so that they may not overwhelm us. Never shall we be tempted above what we are able; for if He impose a burden upon us, He will give us strength to bear it; and our souls shall want no good thing. Never will He forget to console the afflicted at the right time, and never will spiritual bread be wanting. Though the raging sea dash around it, yet the city of God shall remain steadfast, and watered by the fountain of life. The Comforter shall remind us of all of which we stand in need, and we shall be consoled as one who is consoled by his mother. The angels of God are appointed to bear us up in their hands, that we may not dash our feet against a stone; and all, even that which appears indifferent, is ordained to minister to our good. What say ye now, my brethren, to those precious promises, which could be repeated to you by hundreds, and all strengthened by the Word of eternal truth? Is there aught sweeter than *they* are? Can anything enliven the heart more? Do they not dispel all fear from our hearts, and chase the wrinkles of care from our brows! Our heavenly Father watches over our preservation in grace, our sanctification, and our success in the struggle against this world, and enables us to overcome every adversary; in short we may cast all our cares upon Him, with the joyful assurance that He will watch over us, and grant us His eternal love and protection.

Yet you would err, my brethren, were you to imagine that the promises of God were confined to spiritual blessings for His children. Oh, no! There are some applicable to every temporal emergency in which they may be placed. Are they poor? Let them remember the words of the Psalm, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." Are they uneasy lest they do not receive their daily bread? Let them "consider the ravens; for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them; how much more are ye better than the fowls?" If they say, "Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Then we may reply, "O ye of little faith!-consider the lilies of the field, how they grow-if God so clothe the grass of the field-shall He not much more clothe you?" If they lose heart with regard to the result of their occupation and pursuits, then let them listen to the words of the prophet, "I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Is there a scarcity in the land? Then the promise of God, like a benignant angel, comes to greet them. "In famine He shall redeem thee from death-at destruction and famine thou shalt laugh." Does war and murder rage through the earth? Then let them remember that in war God has promised to redeem them from the power of the sword. Are they abused and oppressed by their adversaries? God Himself has said, "Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue; neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh." Is there a widow or an orphan among them? In Psalm 68 it is written, "A Father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in His holy habitation." Are they obliged to defend or exonerate themselves from some heavy charge? Let them remember the injunction, "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what

ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak." Are they anxious for the prosperity of their house? The words of Psalm 107 are, "He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly, and suffereth not their cattle to decrease." Are they in terror and alarm on account of pestilence? Then David says in Psalm 91, "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth *by day*; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday." Are *they* threatened with danger? They know that God has promised to be a wall of fire round about them. If, however, they can find no words of consolation expressly applicable to their circumstances, they have only to inquire what the saints of old experienced in similar emergencies at the hands of the Lord? For the narratives of the trials and deliverances of a Joseph, a Moses, or a Daniel are all divine promises in the form of history. Yet it may happen that even here they can find nothing peculiarly applicable to their difficulty or distress; if so they have still the gracious words of the Lord Jesus, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." And, "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Or the glorious sentence which seems to place at our disposal both the powers of heaven and earth: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." These, my brethren, are only a few of the countless multitude of promises contained in His holy Word, which His compassionate hand throws out like ropes to save us, when we are plunged in the depths of perplexity. Like the tones of David's harp, they calm us in our hours of sorrows, and build for us golden bridges over the seas of affliction. They brighten the dark and misty days which we must pass in Meshech, dispel the clouds which gather over our heads, and illuminate the heaven with the tints of morning.

2. Now that we have taken a rapid glance at the promises, the next question to be asked is, "*What have we to do with them? And in what relation do they stand to us?*" To this we find an answer in the example of that man of God, who is alluded to in our text; and this answer, as we shall hear, is threefold. We must first make ourselves acquainted with the blessed promises contained in our Testament, bind them together to wear as an amulet round our necks, and, if I may so speak, inscribe them on the walls and chambers of our houses. They must be preserved in the casket of memory ready to be used on all occasions, and, like stars which set neither day nor night, they must constantly be shining upon our heads. It is melancholy to think how little the greater part of Christians are acquainted with the promises which God has made to them. The saints of old were wiser, for the words in the book of life were ever before them; most industriously did they collect together all that was consoling and comforting which God had spoken, and from the depth of their souls they could say, "Thy testimonies, O Lord, are ever before me!" In whatever emergency they might be placed, they always knew where to find, in the archives of Emmanuel, some sentence promising assistance; and whatever their circumstances of perplexity might be, they were never without some applicable and striking promise which afforded both to themselves and others consolation and joy. Oh! Were our Christians as familiar and intimate with those promises which they possess, how many tears might be spared, how much grief might be turned into rejoicing, and how much cheerfulness and gladness might be seen in our streets; how would the remarkable answers to prayer and signal deliverances from danger be daily narrated in our dwellings, and how often would be sung the joyful notes of Moses' and Miriam's song! But we have no idea how strongly we are armed, nor what boundless claims we have a right to put forward; we know the privileges of our station but in part, and though we are kings, yet we are kings in a state of beggary.

David points out to us how we should make use of the promises, when he says in Psalm 119, "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever." Well may we join in this sentiment, for the promises in the Bible are addressed to us also: we must apply them to the individual necessities of our lives, and lay claim to them in every emergency in which we may be placed. We must do with them as the Christians did when John and Peter were threatened by their enemies; they

applied the words of the second Psalm to their circumstances, "Why did the heathen rage and the people imagine vain things?" And on the ground of the divine promise, they said, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word." Or follow the example of Paul, when he applied to himself, and Christians in general, an expression which had been uttered to Moses and Joshua during their pilgrimage: "For He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say," he continues, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6). These are the words of David in Psalm 56; but Paul takes those words unhesitatingly, as a promise addressed to the whole Christian community in every necessity. The apostles are in the habit of doing so with the promises throughout the whole Bible; for they regard them as messages from God addressed to the faithful in all ages.

The example of Abraham in our text teaches us what we have next to do with them. After God had promised that the childless patriarch should become the father of many nations, "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform." Most glorious testimony! It is our part now to walk in the steps of the father of the faithful; to console ourselves with the promises which have been given us, to cast anchor among them, clasp them firmly with our whole soul, and casting all care aside, bring them in sure confidence to the throne of grace, relying upon them in our prayers, because what He hath promised He will certainly perform.

Yes, I hear you reply, we must do so with the promises which refer to our spiritual life; but ought we to do so with those which regard temporal things? This objection was by no means unexpected; it induces me however to make the following observations. The promises which regard our spiritual and eternal life, and to which class belong, preservation in grace, assistance during temptation, the dwelling in our hearts of the Holy Spirit, and many others, are without exception fulfilled to the children of God, whether they believe in them or not. We have a sure pledge of this in the merits of Jesus, in the prayer which He made in His character of High Priest (John 17), and in His unceasing intercession for us with His heavenly Father. With regard to the promises concerning temporal benefits, we may say with certainty that if we have faith they shall be fulfilled to us. Yet we do not maintain that they are only fulfilled to those who grasp them in joyful faith, for that were untrue. Many are the desponding widows and orphans to whom the Eternal has shown Himself a protector and a comforter. Many are the Christians weak in faith, who against all hope have been raised suddenly and wonderfully, out of the very depths of despair. This however we will say, whosoever can in perfect confidence, and in a childlike and believing spirit, while kneeling at the mercy seat, appeal to the promises contained in the Word of God; to him they must infallibly be performed. Though the Lord put others to shame, yet will He not put to shame those who trust in Him and believe in His name. To the faithful all things are possible, and the words of Christ Himself are, "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

Shall we then rely unconditionally on the assurance that God, according to His promise, will grant us temporal assistance? Daniel is an example to us; he believed unhesitatingly that God, for His name's sake, would deliver him out of the lion's jaws-and therefore it took place. But there are many examples of a similar kind to be met with in sacred history-take, for instance, Psalm 91. A man is here represented who lives in joyful faith; and he is told in the name of God not to "be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday." It is then added most impressively, "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; *but it shall not come nigh thee.*" Perhaps there is one among you, who, when he reads these words may think, "No, I would rather suffer even unto death, if by doing so I might be with my Savior." This is well, dear brother; and we congratulate thee that thou art thus ready to set sail: thy situation is glorious! There comes another, who, when he sees these words, exclaims in his heart, "Whatever God wills, let it be done; for His will is the best." Blessed art thou also; for thou standest prepared

to submit to the decree of the Lord, whether it be pleasant or unpleasant. There comes a third, who trembles at the thought of death from the rage of the pestilence; but he also finds the words, "It shall not come nigh thee." "Yes," thinks he, his heart being enlivened by joyful faith, "the promises in the Bible are all mine, this one among the rest, 'It shall not come nigh thee!'" He is now transported far above all care and anxiety, and proclaims to his brethren that the pestilence will not come nigh him, for God has promised it; and "God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent." Think you that the soul of the latter is in a worse condition than those of the two former? Or that he should be blamed for reckoning so securely and confidently on God's own words-"It shall not come nigh thee"? And should the True and Faithful One put to shame the faith of this His child, and suffer the truth of His Word to come to nought in His eyes? Impossible, utterly impossible! It were blasphemy to think so. Only consider, my brethren, that the outward and temporal things which we petition for from God, have in most cases a spiritual aspect, and are intimately connected with our internal faith, and our highest interests. Let it be supposed that I have in lively faith taken hold of a promise which assures me of outward and temporal good; it might easily happen that all might depend on the circumstance of its being fulfilled. Perhaps my heart is experiencing the irresistible desire to receive an unequivocal sign that the promises in Scripture are addressed to me. Perhaps my faith in the whole Word of God is in danger, should I in this instance be put to shame and disappointed. Perhaps I persist to request that my petition may be granted, for the honor of God and of His gospel; because, relying upon His Word, I had joyfully made known to the brethren, "Such and such things will happen!" Perhaps I am on the verge of the frightful thought: God has removed His hand from me, and I shall be swallowed up in this abyss, if the Lord do not grant my prayer, and show me once more the light of His fatherly countenance! Thus, my brethren, it may often happen that the most important spiritual interests may require that I persist fervently and unconditionally in requesting God to grant some temporal petition. Though asking for the things of time, I may cry out like David, when he prayed to be delivered from his enemies, "O Lord, my rock; be not silent to me; lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit." "O my God, I trust in Thee; let me not be ashamed!" My request for temporal benefits rests upon the express promise of God; for I have the words firmly engraved on my heart-"And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." My spiritual life is so closely connected with the granting of my prayer, that my faith would suffer shipwreck were the Lord not to hear me. In these circumstances, could you be justified in saying to me-"No, it is wrong in this emergency to hope with such confidence in the Divine assistance; here you must doubt and pray with certain limitations."

3. The manner in which promises are accomplished which have been grasped by the hand of faith, they know best who have personally experienced them. It is the opinion of many, that *they* are seldom accomplished until after many struggles and trials; or at least that though we have much to contend with, that is no reason why our faith should waver. This was the experience of the saints of old When Joshua believed that he had now only to make a division of the promised land, the men of Ai came up against Israel, and the promises of God seemed for a time as though *they* were not to be fulfilled. When Abraham, after hearing the words of God, believed himself certain of a numerous posterity, he was commanded to take his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and offer him up a sacrifice upon Mount Moriah. When the sailors to whom Paul cried out-"And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you!"-when they believed his words, and in spirit beheld themselves already saved; their ship must first be stranded, and with it the probability of their deliverance. In short, is there any among the saints of old, who ever received the accomplishment of a promise, without having their faith previously exercised? In Moses we have a striking example of this; for while he was watching the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro, in the desert near Mount Horeb, the Lord appeared unto him, and said, "Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee that I have sent thee: when thou

hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain." With these words the Lord virtually planted His standard upon the summit of Horeb; though immediately afterwards it seemed to wave idly in the wind; for there was little probability, that Moses along with the children of Israel would ever sacrifice here; and yet God had said, and His words would surely remain steadfast, "Ye shall serve God upon this mountain." Innumerable difficulties and hindrances arose to render the accomplishment of this promise, to human eyes, well nigh impossible; but God kept His word, and Moses, though after many delays, was enabled to do so. Pharaoh with his host rose up against the people, but Moses did not despair, for he still heard the voice of God resounding from Horeb, "Ye shall serve God upon this mountain!" The Red Sea, with its raging waves, leagued itself with Pharaoh; "Alas," thought Moses, when he beheld dimly beyond the billows, the banner of God waving on the distant height, "Never shall we be able to reach it!" But the standard beckoned, and the voice of the Eternal again repeated, "Ye shall serve God upon this mountain!" Difficulty after difficulty was surmounted, barrier after barrier was thrown down, until at last the Israelites, having overcome all opposition, stood in triumph on Mount Horeb. The smoke of the incense now curled joyfully up to heaven, and Moses and the Israelites could praise, in hymns of joy, the faithfulness of the God of Jacob, is who had now fulfilled His promise, "Ye shall serve God upon this mountain!"

Yes, my brethren, God will stand to His Word, if ye rely upon it in faith: only believe with Abraham, "Though I slay the son of so many promises, yet God is able for His Word's sake to raise him again from the dead." And most assuredly He will do it; sooner will heaven and earth pass away than one single word of His fall to the ground. How many instances could I relate to prove that He will keep His covenant unto those that trust in Him; unto those who with firm and steadfast grasp lay hold of the divine promises; and who in every emergency rely upon His Word! They proclaim amongst their brethren-"For His name's sake the Lord will deliver us!" And in fact the Lord does deliver them, time after time, in the most wonderful and astonishing manner, fulfilling in them the words of the Psalmist, "Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!"

Since the promises of God are thus performed; why do ye grieve and sorrow anymore, and why are lamentations heard in our streets? Can ye not read the words of consolation which are interwoven through the whole Bible? Are they not the steps which form the ladder by which ye ascend in prayer to God, secure in the conviction that He will not refuse His promised aid and assistance? Let Abraham teach you what you have to rest upon. Verily, verily, the arm of the Lord is never shortened; He is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and what He once said unto Martha, He says unto all, "If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God."

.Amen.

This message is taken from:
The Church's Voice of Instruction
R.B. Seeley & W Burnside
London
1839

Published by
PIETAN PUBLICATIONS
26 Green Farm Road
New Ipswich, New Hampshire
USA 03071

Printed in the United States of America
2002

