

The Promises of God

Great and Precious Promises
from God to His People



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THE PROMISES OF GOD

Quarterly Aim: To show that the Lord has provided great and precious promises to His children.

CONTENTS

Lesson No. 1, December 5, 2010	
The Promise of the Bow	2
Lesson No. 2, December 12, 2010	
The Promise to Abraham	7
Lesson No. 3, December 19, 2010	
The Promise to David	12
Lesson No. 4, December 26, 2010	
The Promise of the Messiah	17
Lesson No. 5, January 2, 2011	
The Promise of Salvation	22
Lesson No. 6, January 9, 2011	
The Promise of Security	27
Lesson No. 7, January 16, 2011	
The Promise to His Church	31
Lesson No. 8, January 23, 2011	
The Promise of the Comforter	36
Lesson No. 9, January 30, 2011	
The Promise of Christ's Return	41
Lesson No. 10, February 6, 2011	
The Promise of Answered Prayer	46
Lesson No. 11, February 13, 2011	
The Promise of His Word	50
Lesson No. 12, February 20, 2011	
The Promise of God's Care	55
Lesson No. 13, February 27, 2011	
The Promise of Godly Wisdom	60

The Promise of the Bow

APPLICATION

To show how a visible sign is given by God about His promise never to destroy the earth again by water.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Genesis 9:11-17.

Related Scripture: Genesis 6:1-7; Exodus 12:25; Numbers 14:11-20; Joshua 23:5; 1 Kings 8:56; 2 Chronicles 1:9; Nehemiah 5:5-9; Psalm 105:42; Luke 1:72, 73; Titus 1:1-4; Hebrews 10:22-25.

Devotional Reading: The Rainbow Is Around the Throne of God, Revelation 4:1-3.

Introduction

The Bible is filled with promises God has made. Some of them concern present-day needs, while others will be fulfilled in the future. The question someone might ask is, “Are God’s promises reliable? Will He be able to keep all the promises He has made?” What He has said is steadfast and secure. He is the “God, that cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). God’s people can have assurance in what He has declared. Second Peter 3:9 proclaims, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness.” This means the Lord will do exactly what He says and will do it in His appropriate time. He will not delay in keeping His Word. A contrast is given in that verse. People might delay in keeping their promises. They might have all the good intentions, but circumstances might prohibit their abilities to do the promises on time. That is not true with God. What He has said, He will do. He will never delay performing His Word.

The human race began as a direct creation of God. He formed Adam and Eve and set them in the garden. Through their

rebellion, Adam and Eve cast the entire human race into a state of sinfulness. Their descendants inherited the sin nature. As time went by, more and more people surrendered to their sinful desires. Their sinfulness was so pronounced that God could not abide (endure) their rebellion. It was time for Him to take action. What happened as a result of humanity's sinfulness and God's judgment will set the stage for the promise God gave concerning the rainbow.

1. _____ **God Pronounced Judgment on Earth**

As the population began to increase on earth, the people had a choice to make. They should have chosen to follow the Almighty God. Instead, the vast majority of people went down the path of fleshly pleasure. They had no restraint on their wicked thoughts. God “saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). People gave no thought to God or His will. They ran to fulfill the desires of their hearts. Knowing the evil of their hearts and the unrestrained evil they engaged in, God was grieved that He had ever created the human race (verse 6). People were so full of evil and corruption He saw no hope of their change. He determined another course of action. He would bring judgment upon them. “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them” (verse 7).

Through all the evil of the world, God saw one person who was right with Him. This man, Noah, had received God's grace and was acceptable in His sight. God's plan was to preserve Noah and his righteous line so the earth could be repopulated. This was truly an act of grace. The human race did not deserve to be preserved, but God loved His creation so much that He was willing to provide a means by which it could remain on earth. That plan was the ark. The Lord called out to Noah revealing what He would do. Noah would build a large boat and would bring provisions within it. God would draw representatives of all animal life to the ark, and they would be preserved when God's judgment by the flood came upon the earth. Noah, his sons and

their wives would go into the ark and would also be saved from destruction. Noah began the work God had assigned him.

Noah worked on the ark and its provisions for one hundred twenty years (verse 3). During that time, he diligently performed the work exactly as God instructed. In addition to the physical work of building the ark, Noah also warned those around him of the judgment yet to come. Peter described him as being “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5). Noah wanted people to have the opportunity to receive God’s grace as well. Though he was faithful to preach for all those years, only his family received the message of hope and salvation. Only eight people entered the ark. God’s judgment was poured out on the earth. All those outside the ark of safety perished in the flood as He said.

This story offers a warning to people on earth today. If God was not pleased with the sinful thoughts and behavior of people thousands of years ago, He is not pleased with it today. In a world that seems determined to follow sinful paths, people are living as rebelliously as they did in Noah’s day. They are going about their lives with little or no concern for God and His ways. They are drifting further and further away from the standards of righteousness established by God. He cannot be happy when the world denies His existence and follows the way of sin. What God said in the days of Noah is real today. “My spirit shall not always strive with man” (Gen. 6:3). The time will come when God’s judgment will fall on those who rebel against Him. People must be made aware. That is the responsibility of churches. Churches are to take the message of the gospel to a lost and dying generation. People’s destiny without Christ is eternity in hell. God’s people must try to snatch them out of the fire (Jude 23).

2. _____ **God Promised Justice on Earth**

When the flood had receded from the earth, Noah and his family were able to exit the ark. The earth was renewed. The silt deposited by the flood would have been fertile. The materials available to them would have been almost without limit. They could do great things from that day forward. The only worry might have been whether God would once again bring such a devastating flood upon the earth. God was soon to eliminate that

fear. He made a covenant with Noah, his family and the entire earth. This covenant was a great promise made with Noah.

It was a covenant from God (Gen. 9:11). Since it was based on the character of God, it was an agreement of infinite value and durability. The promise of any person might give hope, but it is not one hundred percent certain. The individual might break the promise for some unforeseen reason. God is not that way. He cannot lie and will not say one thing and do another. Since this covenant was from God, it was something Noah and all following generations could look upon with trust.

It was a perpetual covenant, one that would last for all following generations (verses 12, 15). God's promise to Noah and the human race was that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood of water. It was not that He did not have the power to do so. It was that He has a different plan for the end of the world. All generations who live on earth have the assurance that God will never flood the entire world again. There have been and will continue to be floods that strike certain areas. Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast and devastated much of the Louisiana-Mississippi shoreline through the storm surge and floods that followed. Cities and regions will suffer under the distress of regional floods, but the world will never be destroyed in one, cataclysmic flood. All generations have this promise from the Lord.

It was a covenant with a sign (verses 13, 14). When the Lord made this promise to Noah, He spoke of a sign to confirm what He said. He would set His "bow in the cloud" as the "token of a covenant between me and the earth" (verse 13). He said that every time He brought a cloud of rain on the earth, a rainbow would be seen in the sky as a reminder of this promise. Did God need that rainbow to remind Him what He had said? No, God never forgets. The rainbow is a sign of the covenant He declared. It reminds people what God has said. The rainbow is a sign of God's mercy. In John's vision of God sitting upon His throne, he saw a rainbow encircling the throne. It showed the wondrous beauty of the One sitting there. The promises of God will be fulfilled. Nothing the Lord says will go undone. The rainbow is a reminder of the steadfastness of the Savior.

Conclusion

The covenant God made with Noah and humanity was not a promise made because they deserved it. The judgment God brought on the world through the flood was deserved. The people had turned from their Creator. They followed their own desires. When He destroyed them, it was an example of His justice.

The world has followed the same path. It no longer wants to retain the knowledge of God. The people want to be natural creatures who can do as they please. The vast majority of the world is living according to the dictates of the flesh. Judgment is deserved even today. But another aspect of God is His wondrous mercy. He is willing to delay His judgment so others will have the opportunity to be saved. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The certainty of His promises assures us that He is always willing to save those who will come to Him. What a glorious and merciful Savior we serve!

The Promise to Abraham

APPLICATION

To show how God spoke to an individual, Abraham, with great promises.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-8.

Related Scripture: Genesis 15:14; 18:18; 22:15-18; 26:2-4, 24; 28:10-15, 20-22; Deuteronomy 26:5-9; 1 Kings 3:8; Psalm 105:42; Acts 3:25; Romans 9:8, 9; 11:1-5; Galatians 3:8, 18.

Devotional Reading: God Never Forgot His Promise to Abraham and His Seed, Acts 7:17-19.

Introduction

The Bible has related the history of many important people. One such person was Abraham. He grew up in Ur of the Chaldees. It was located near the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Archeologists have uncovered many clay writing tablets, much jewelry and other art treasures proving how advanced the city was. The people were idolatrous. God came to Abraham instructing him to depart into a foreign land (Acts 7:2-4). The call was to separate from all who worshiped false gods, so Abraham would not be influenced by their evil behavior. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees but took his father and family with him. They traveled as far as Haran (Gen. 11:31, called Charran in Acts 7:4). Haran was on the main trade route between southern Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean Sea. It also was a hotbed of idolatrous worship. This was not the place God wanted Abraham to be. The family remained there until Abraham's father died. Abraham was the patriarch of the family and they would do what he said. The Lord came to Abraham once again with His

demand. They were to leave Haran and travel to the land chosen by the Lord. There, the Lord would bring His blessings on Abraham and his family.

Abraham's life was one of spasmodic growth. He began by partially responding to the call of God. He left Ur but did not travel as far as God wanted. Then some years later, he took another step by departing from Haran and traveling to the land of Canaan. Abraham often exhibited limited faith in the Lord. But his faith continued to grow. The time came when he was able to follow a command from the Lord. It was a difficult command. He was to take his promised son, Isaac, and offer him as a sacrifice to the Lord. He stepped out in faith, trusting the Lord to handle the situation (Heb. 11:17-19). God's plans are not always easy to follow. Sometimes what He wants seems completely impossible. God always has our good in mind. With Abraham, God called him out of his native land. Though it was difficult, God had marvelous promises to offer. This man would receive great blessings from the Lord.

1. _____ **The Promise of a Great Nation**

One must endeavor to get the picture of what was happening with Abraham. He had been under the hand of his father all his life. Their family had left their original homeland and settled in Haran. For years they lived there. Now his father was gone and God expected him to leave his home once again. They were not a large family. It consisted of Abraham, his wife and his nephew. They had servants to help with their flocks, but the family was small. Yet, to this insignificant family, God made wondrous promises.

The first promise from God was that Abraham would become "a great nation" (Gen. 12:2). This word pointed to governmental power. He would be more than a tribal family. He would be the forebearer of a powerful nation. After several years passed, God reaffirmed this promise by stating, "Thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee" (Gen. 17:4-6). This promise was beyond his imagination. How could it possibly be? It could only come through the mighty hands of God.

People often question how God can accomplish what He promises. They try to evaluate God by human standards. People make promises and intend to keep them, but miserably fail because they do not have the strength to follow through. God never fails. The Lord spoke to Abraham about having a son. He grew older. When he reached the age of ninety-nine years, God once again gave His promise of a son. When he heard the unbelievable words of the Lord, Abraham “fell upon his face, and laughed” (Gen. 17:17). How could it be? His wife was well past the child-bearing years. It was humanly impossible. Nothing is too hard for God (Gen. 18:14). He would keep His promise.

While the promise to make childless Abraham into a great nation seemed impossible, it was certain to happen. God does not arbitrarily state things. He is God and cannot lie (Titus 1:2). The descendants of Abraham would form great nations, the greatest of which is the nation of Israel. It is the focus of many of God’s glorious promises. He will keep every one.

2. _____

The Promise of Great Blessings and Curses

Another aspect of the promise God gave Abraham concerned the treatment of him and his descendants by other people. It was a promise and a warning. “I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee” (Gen. 12:3). Those who would treat his descendants with compassion and caring would receive blessings from God. Those who sought to destroy or harm the people of God would, in turn, be punished by the hands of God. This has proven true over the centuries. All nations who tried to destroy the Israelites ultimately suffered defeat. This was true even when those nations were used by God to act as His chastening hands. God used the Assyrian empire to discipline the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He sent prophets warning the Israelites of their coming punishment. They refused to listen to God. The Assyrians took Israel into captivity. That nation was soon defeated by the Babylonians. Many years later, the Southern Kingdom of Judah faced the same trouble. They had turned away from God to serve idols. God’s prophets warned of what was to come. They refused to listen. God sent the Babylonians against them as punishment. The nation was taken into captivity for seventy years. Prior to the seventy years being completed, the

Babylonians were attacked by the Medo-Persian empire. The force that seemed unassailable was swiftly defeated. Why did these nations fall? They fought against the people of God.

This promise is still true today. Nations which stand in opposition to Israel face the danger of God's anger. When Israel was finally granted permission by the United Nations to form a sovereign nation once again, the proclamation was opposed by the Muslim nations surrounding it. They attacked with the desire of driving all Jews into the sea. In spite of facing overwhelming odds, the Israelites were able to hold their ground and retain their national identity. In 1967, those nations once again decided to attack Israel. Forces from Egypt, Jordan and Syria were joined by soldiers from several other nations. The battles only lasted six days. Israel gained control over Jerusalem and additional territory. Israel should have been defeated, but God brought the victory. The promise of God will always stand sure. Those who curse Israel will be cursed by God.

Another aspect of the promise of God's great blessing comes in the promise of the Messiah. "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). The greatest blessing the world will ever see came through Abraham's greater son. The Abrahamic Covenant promised a Savior. He would not be the Savior for the world. God did not promise, in thee shall thy descendants be blessed. He declared that all people of the earth would have the opportunity to be saved. This promise was fulfilled when Jesus came to earth as the sacrifice for sin. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). All who are thirsty for the spiritual water of Christ can freely partake of His life-giving fountain (Rev. 22:17).

3. _____ **The Promise of a Great Future**

The promises made to Abraham were not solely for his lifetime. People often make limited time offers. This means they will do something if the recipient takes advantage of it prior to its expiration date. Or sometimes people promise to help another person for a specific amount of time. This was not what God did. He promised Abraham that He would hold to His covenant for all succeeding generations. As long as the Jewish people exist, God will perform His Word. This means the land given to Abraham those many millennia ago remains the possession of

His descendants. The struggle over the land granted to Abraham and his descendants has been settled. No matter what claims others might make over it, Israel possesses the land God gave it. The future will not change this truth.

God's children have many promises from their Heavenly Father. Seeing the faithfulness of God in keeping His Word to Israel as the descendants of Abraham gives assurance that He will perform all He has said. He could never say one thing and do another. He cannot lie. Therefore, His children can have great hope when looking to the future.

Conclusion

Abraham was far from being perfect. Though he was going through times of growth in his relationship with God, he still faced days when his faith was not all it should have been. Did this mean God would go back on His promises? Would God cancel what He had previously said? No, His Word is always steadfast and His promises secure. He continued to bring Abraham along the path of spiritual growth. This is still the way He deals with His children. He wants us to follow Him. He wants us to have total faith in Him. When we fail, He will not forsake us. That would be a denial of His character. He continues to love us and will always keep His promises. You can continue to trust Him because He will continue to love you.



The Promise to David

APPLICATION

David's love for God is seen in his desire to build the Lord a house.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: 2 Samuel 7:1-17.

Related Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:28, 29; 1 Kings 5:2-5; 6:12; 8:56; 1 Chronicles 22:8-13; 28:3-6; Psalms 89:3, 4; 119:142, 151; John 8:40; 17:17.

Devotional Reading: Solomon Speaks of God's Completing His Promise for the Temple, 1 Kings 8:12-20.

Introduction

King David was one of the most prominent characters of the Old Testament. Even as a youngster, he was a busy person. The battle against the giant Goliath is well-known. In spite of his many victories in battle, David was not a perfect man. There were times when he made the wrong choices. But through it all, he maintained a heart that loved the Lord. When he failed, he was ready to return to the Lord in repentance. He wanted his fellowship with God to remain strong (Psalm 51:12). God had chosen David as the king of Israel because he was "a man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22).

David set a good example for God's people to follow. It is easy to think about God when things are difficult and a person needs His help. When facing a dreaded disease, financial fallout or domestic distress, one can easily see the need of turning to the Lord and seeking His assistance. David thought about God even when times were good. He had spent many of his formative years in the wilderness tending his father's sheep while communing with

God. He had written some of his psalms while alone at night peering into the fathomless sky above him. He often thought about God and how he could better worship his Redeemer. The focus of God's people would be improved if they considered Him in their lives. This was what David reflected in the words of this lesson. He wanted to honor God. In return, God offered him a wonderful promise.

1. _____

David's Proposal

God had blessed David throughout the years of his reign. Even prior to his elevation to the throne, David had been in the mind of God. In his battle with Goliath, God had brought the victory. King Saul pursued David to kill him, but God's hands of protection were on David. When David ascended to the throne, God continued to bless him. Though many nations attacked God's chosen nation, David was able to lead the people to victory. He was a mighty leader and powerful warrior, but the victory belonged to the Lord (2 Sam. 7:1).

David knew exactly why his reign had been blessed. He lived in the finest palace in the kingdom. He received honor from the people and the many nations around him. His blessings made him aware of the centuries-old Tabernacle which was the center of worship for Jehovah. He knew something was wrong. Why was he worthy to live in a beautiful house of cedar and the Lord's house remain a tent (verse 2)? He wanted to do more for the glory of God.

David approached his spiritual advisor, Nathan the prophet. David wanted to build a structure worthy of the God of the universe. He was offering to build a beautiful house to be the center of worship for his God. He wanted something that would reflect the feelings of love and devotion he felt toward God. The initial response of the prophet of God was, "Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee" (verse 3).

The attitude shown by David on that occasion should serve to challenge God's people even today. Far too often, the house dedicated to God's worship does not reflect His majesty and splendor. People sometimes want to construct the least expensive, least ornate building for their services. They might live in nice, brick houses with all the luxuries they can afford, but they have a ramshackle building for God. What does this say to the commu-

nity about the church's devotion to God? When the church yard is unkept, the building unpainted and the sign falling down, the community rightly assumes the church really does not care too much about the Lord. God is worthy of the best we can do. People need the attitude of David. God is worthy of better than we have. Are we willing to give it to Him?

2. _____

God's Plan

After Nathan left David's presence, the Lord spoke to him concerning the Temple David wished to construct. While it might have been an admirable goal for David, it was not God's will for him to build the Temple. God reminded David of all he had gone through. God had called David while he was a lowly shepherd. It was not his military expertise that caused God to appoint him as king. It was not his family position that made him worthy to rule. Because David cared more about God than he did about himself, God selected him to serve the nation as its leader.

As king, God had given David the ability to prevail in battles against his enemies. Any nation that attacked Israel was sure to face defeat. As a result, David was looked upon by all surrounding kingdom as a mighty man. Even today, David is considered the greatest warrior king of the nation of Israel. This came about because God helped him in battle.

God asked, "In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?" (2 Sam. 7:7). If it had been His desire to have a permanent house of worship prior to that day, He would have instructed His servants to fulfill His desire. This did not mean He would never have a permanent house. It was not time.

Why was it that David was not allowed to build the Temple of God? In later years, David related his desire for a Temple to be built. He encouraged the people to prepare for building the house of God. The reason he had not been allowed to build it was, "God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood" (1 Chron. 28:3). This was not a reproach on David as king. His reign had been necessary to secure the nation of Israel in peace

and safety. But his warfare had disqualified him from building the Temple.

God always has a plan for His work. Often it disagrees with what churches or individuals have considered. They work out their plans and think they know the better way. Then, God places a stumbling block in the way. Does it mean He does not want the work accomplished? Maybe it simply means He wants it done another way or at another time. The members of one church faced a terrible tragedy. Their sanctuary collapsed. They were hoping for a quick solution to the problem, but each time it appeared they were moving forward, another stumbling block got in the way. Each stumbling block caused a delay of months. Finally, after eighteen months of waiting, the church members were able to break ground on their new, beautiful sanctuary. Why all the delays? No one but God knows. Each person and each church must be willing to submit to God's plans and God's timing.

3. _____

God's Promise

Though God had denied David the right of building the Temple, He still had a purpose for the future. His son, Solomon, would have that task before him. David could have rebelled against God and done what he wanted anyway. Instead, he maintained a heart of worship.

God gave David a greater promise than the opportunity to construct a building. God's promise dealt with the future. "When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (2 Sam. 7:12, 13). This was a promise that David's line would always be the proper lineage for the throne. But it was an even greater promise than that. It was a statement concerning the Messiah who would come, provide the way of salvation and would sit upon the throne of David forever and ever. It was a perpetual covenant between God and David. The roots of this promise went all the way back to Jacob when he blessed his sons prior to his death. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come" (Gen. 49:10). The right to reign would rest in the tribe of Judah. Now

the covenant was more specific. Not only would rightful kings come from Judah, they would be descended from David. This would remain true until the great Peace Giver, Shiloh, would come. He, the Messiah, will reign forever. What greater hope could David have? He was assured of his continuing lineage (2 Sam. 7:16).

Conclusion

David's acceptance of God's decree was shown by his actions in later years. The time of his reign drew to a close. He knew it was the responsibility of his son, Solomon, to build the house of God. He did not leave him without help or direction. David stored up great wealth for use in the building project. He did this because of his great love for God. He wanted Him to receive all honor and glory.

The promise made to David was fulfilled when Jesus came to earth. He was and is the Messiah. His work during His first time on earth was to provide the way of salvation and to establish His church. He did His work and ascended to Heaven. This does not mean the promise to David was completed. He will always sit upon the throne because He is worthy. God's people need to realize His majesty and worth so they will always offer Him the worship He is due. He will reign on the throne forever.

The Promise of the Messiah

APPLICATION

To show that Christ was prophesied to enter into the world as Savior.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Isaiah 7:14; 11:1-5; Acts 13:25.

Related Scripture: Genesis 3:15, 18; Isaiah 9:6, 7; 11:1-5; 52:7; 53:1-12; Jeremiah 23:5; Ezekiel 34:23; Zechariah 9:9; Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:18-21; 2:1, 2; Luke 1:35; Acts 3:22-24; 1 Peter 1:10-12.

Devotional Reading: Moses Told of the Messiah and Described Him as a Prophet, Deuteronomy 18:15.

Introduction

The entire Jewish people's mind-set revolved around their desire for the Messiah to come. Since the earliest days of human history, God had given people the promise of a coming Redeemer. When Adam rebelled against God by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the human race was cast into a state of sin. The people were helpless to change their sinful condition. God spoke of what was yet to come. To the serpent (Satan) He said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). One would come who would take care of the problem of sin. Later, when God called Abraham to depart from his land of nativity, He also gave a promise. The promise included, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). This was the hope of the Jews. They longed for the day of His coming. When taken into captivity, they waited for their Deliverer. When foreign powers oppressed them, they

desired Him to come and relieve their problems. Their greatest desire was for their Messiah to come.

Looking back at this promise can produce a sense of hope in the hearts of God's people even today. The Messiah was not an afterthought in the plan of God. He knew what would be needed for the redemption of humanity and set that plan in motion. God cared enough to provide this gift. People need a better understanding of God's promise of the Messiah. He is "the desire of all nations" (Haggai 2:7).

1. _____ **The Promise of a Sign**

Ahaz was king over Judah. He was a rebellious king. He worshiped Baal and even offered his children as a sacrifice to the idol. The nation faced attacks from its northern enemies from Israel and Syria. God promised the attacks would not succeed. He told Ahaz to choose a sign to assure him of God's help. In his haughty unbelief, Ahaz refused. The Lord responded, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). It sounds like an innocent statement concerning the time frame involved in causing those northern enemies to retreat. It contained much greater depth than that. It was a promise of the coming Messiah. He would be born of a virgin.

This was not the only Old Testament Scripture giving the promise of the virgin born Son of God. The judgment against the serpent in the Garden of Eden at least hinted at this truth. The coming Redeemer would be the seed of the woman. This is not the ordinary method. The seed transfers through the male. God's statement that early in time showed He had set a plan in motion. A woman would conceive and bear a child without the need of a man. God would send His Son to earth. Jeremiah received a message from God with the same focus. "The LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man" (Jer. 31:22). This "new thing" was something unprecedented, something that did not follow the natural course of nature. What was that new thing? A woman would bear a child without an earthly father. This does not mean she created the child on her own. She was the human vessel that brought the Son of God to earth.

Though the prophecy given by Isaiah was of the virgin birth of the Son of God, the time for His arrival on earth had not arrived. It was still seven hundred years from the appointed time. Yet, there would come a time when a virgin would conceive and bear the Messiah. That promise from God was fulfilled through Mary.

Mary loved God. She wanted nothing more than to serve Him. One day God sent His messenger to the young virgin. The angel said, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28). God had looked upon her as His special vessel. She would be blessed. What would that blessing be? "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (verses 31-33). Those statements dealt with the great covenants of the Jewish people. Reigning over the house of Jacob meant He would fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant that promised Him the right to bless all the families of the earth. Receiving the throne of David meant He would fulfill the Davidic Covenant that promised the Messiah would come through the line of David and would have the authority to rule eternally. The promise spoken to Mary was one of great blessing both to her and to the human race. Mary submitted to the will of God. She became the receptacle for the divine. She gave birth to the Son of God.

When this word came to Mary, she was engaged to Joseph. It became known that his bride was with child. He was a just man who was full of integrity. He would handle the situation privately. That night an angel came to him in a dream revealing what God had done. The baby Mary carried was the Son of God. Mary had done nothing wrong. The angel told Joseph to take Mary as his wife. He obeyed God's commandment.

The birth of the Messiah did not come by accident. Even the time was directed by God. Daniel had written his vision concerning the weeks appointed to Israel. He specified the number of weeks (weeks of years) that would transpire before the coming of the Messiah. At the appropriate time, the Messiah would "be cut off, but not for himself" (Dan. 9:26). When Jesus was finally

born, Mary took Him to the Temple for the offering specified by the Law. An old saint, Simeon, met them there. He was “just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). One reason he could anticipate the coming Messiah was the prophecy of Daniel. At the exact moment that was appropriate, God sent His Son to earth (Gal. 4:4). His birth was the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise.

3. _____ **The Promise Explained in Immanuel**

When the Lord gave the sign of the virgin birth of His Son, He declared the Promised One would be “Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14) meaning, “God with us.” He would be more than merely a good man, more than a great prophet or teacher. He would be God in human form. While this was expressed in the name given Him, it was more fully demonstrated in the New Testament. When John introduced his gospel, he did so with words showing the eternal character of Jesus. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The title, “the Word,” was a word showing that the essential character of God was expressed in physical form through this One. Paul used a similar thought. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). The fullness Paul talked about described a container filled to overflowing. Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God. This was why the writer of Hebrews described Him as “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3). The term, *express image*, has the idea of a stamped out copy. Jesus is the fullness and exact physical image of God.

What is the value of having God come to earth in human flesh? The Old Testament tells of a kinsman redeemer. If a person became destitute, he could be sold to pay his debts. A near kinsman could pay the debt and redeem him from slavery. Humanity is the natural enemy of God. People are enslaved by sin. Someone had to pay the price to buy them out of slavery. Not just anyone could do so. It required a kinsman redeemer. The only One who could qualify for this would be the sinless Son of God. He came to earth, took the form of a man and paid the price of sin. He is Immanuel, God with us. This was why He came to earth as a human being.

Conclusion

The promise of the Messiah is a glorious promise. No person deserves to stand in the presence of God. Jesus came to earth as the promised One, the Anointed One, the Messiah, to satisfy the righteous demands of God. He paid the price of sin. Because of this, all people have the opportunity to be saved.

What does this promise mean to you? Sometimes we take for granted all that Jesus did in coming to earth as Christ. The Jews expected a conquering hero who would throw off the shackles of oppression. He would lead them to victory and establish them once again as a sovereign, independent kingdom. The problem was that they forgot certain prophecies concerning the Messiah. He would be the suffering Servant who would be cut off (killed) for others. This was what He did the first time He came. But His story is not over. He will return someday to take His saints to be with Him. He will establish His kingdom and will rule on the throne of David. We can live in anticipation of the day of His return. In that day, all the hopes and dreams of the human race will be realized. He will sit as King.

The Promise of Salvation

APPLICATION

To show that God's plan of salvation in Jesus gives eternal spiritual life.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: John 3:16; 5:24.

Related Scripture: Isaiah 45:22; Psalm 119:41; John 1:12; 3:18, 36; 5:24; Ephesians 1:13; 2:8-10; 2 Timothy 2:9; Hebrews 2:10; 5:9; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 1 John 5:10-12; Revelation 1:17, 18.

Devotional Reading: Faith in Jesus Alone Brings Salvation, Romans 10:8-17.

Introduction

One of the infinite attributes of God is His omniscience. God knows all things. Nothing is hidden from the mind of God. In eternity past, God already had His plan for the human race mapped out. He understood that Adam would rebel against Him. This would require Him to devise a plan whereby sinful humanity could be restored to fellowship with God. Human reasoning would declare the simplest course of action would be to destroy His creation and to begin again. But, as surely as God is omniscient, He also has an infinite capacity for love. He would not destroy His work. Instead, He would provide the way to deliver the people from eternal damnation. From the beginning God had His plan ready to implement.

God brought Adam and Eve into existence. Soon Adam failed to obey God. With Adam's rebellion, a breach in the fellowship between God and Adam was created. This breach was not only for Adam. It was also for all his descendants. Every person born

of a human father has that nature to sin. God was not content to allow His creation to perish eternally. He showed Adam and Eve His plan immediately. God sacrificed an animal and used its skin as a covering for their nakedness. The principle of a blood sacrifice for sin was taught by that act.

The principle of a blood sacrifice being required for the covering for sin has been taught and shown down through the ages. God commanded Abraham to take his son to a mountain to sacrifice him. When they arrived there, God provided a ram as a substitute for his son. The ram was slain and offered to God. Under the Law, animals were often sacrificed to picture God's covering and forgiveness of sin. All of those Old Testament examples pointed forward to the day when Jesus Christ would become the ultimate sacrifice for sins. He would be the payment for sins once for all (Heb. 9:12; 10:10). It is the purpose of this lesson to show God's marvelous promise of salvation to those who would believe. It is an expression of His infinite love.

1. _____ **The Demonstration of Love**

To consider the cost of sin, one must endeavor to understand the holiness of God. Throughout the Bible, God's character is shown to be of the highest ideal. He is often presented as being light as opposed to darkness. The two are eminently opposed. Light and darkness cannot exist in the same place. A room can be totally darkened by covering the windows and doors and extinguishing all sources of light. This is the kind of darkness experienced deep within a cave. Where there are no external sources of light, only darkness prevails. However, if a single match is struck, the darkness recedes and light begins to prevail. The two cannot coexist. Since God is Light, then, all that is opposed to God must be darkness. The difference between the pristine white of light and utter darkness shows the difference between the holy God and sinful humanity. Since He is completely holy and perfect, anything less is an insult to His character. Something must be done to bridge the gap between the two.

Sinful humanity is at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7). This means hostility or opposition. It speaks of the utter hatred the natural mind has for the perfection of God. Some might question whether this is true. Does a natural person have hostility toward God?

This anger and bitterness toward God is why so many people want to deny His existence. They think they are happier if He does not exist. But no amount of denial can change the reality of God. The question then is, how can God reconcile sinful humanity to Himself? How could God in His infinite perfection reach down to help a sinful people? The Old Testament word for *grace* has the idea of one who is willing to stoop down or condescend to help one who is inferior, to give favor to one who is undeserving. God was willing to stoop down to help those who were helpless. He would condescend to reach out to those who were far below Him.

The tool used in accomplishing this task was His infinite love. The lesson Text declares, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). This act of God was the climax of all Old Testament sacrifices. Those offerings served as an object lesson about what God would ultimately do in sending His only begotten Son to serve as the substitute for all people. Every animal that was slain and burned upon the altar should have reminded the people of God’s love for them. Isaiah wrote about the sacrifice that would satisfy the demands of God. “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied:...for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:7, 11). The love of God was demonstrated when Jesus went to the cross and died as the sacrifice for sins. No greater love could be shown than what Jesus was willing to do (John 15:13). His sacrifice for others is the ultimate expression of God’s love.

2. _____ **The Application of His Love**

The work of Christ in coming to earth as the sacrifice for sin was an act people need to understand. But, if all a person ever does is seek an intellectual understanding of the work of Christ, that individual will never experience what God has provided. It is far more than an intellectual exercise. The sacrifice of Jesus is the means by which a person can be saved. He wants all people to be saved. He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). How can a person apply the blood of Jesus Christ to receive the forgiveness of sins?

First, people must realize their natural condition. The woman at the well (John 4) had some understanding of spiritual matters. When Jesus began a conversation with her, she was willing to discuss religious matters. That was not sufficient to meet her real need. It was only when Jesus convinced her of her sinful condition that she was willing to trust Him as Savior. This is the way it is with all people. Too many people think they have done enough good in life to deserve recognition from God. The fact is, no one can do any good works (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:23). Until there is a realization of sin, no one will see the need of repenting.

Second, people must repent of their sins and trust in Jesus as Savior. Some might ask, "Which comes first, the repentance or the faith?" These matters are virtually simultaneous. When people realize they are sinners, they want a solution to the problem. They also realize that Jesus is the only help they can have so they call upon Him. This trust in Christ and repentance are intimately intertwined. No one will really trust the Lord without repenting of sins. No one can repent of sins without believing Christ can forgive him.

Some people have the mistaken notion that they will qualify for a relationship with Christ merely because they are alive. They claim the universal fatherhood of God. They believe God will accept all people into His family. That is not a biblical teaching. For a person to become a child of God, that individual must trust Jesus as Savior. God's love is offered to all people, but they must come His way. His way is Jesus (John 14:6).

3. _____ **The Promise of Life Because of Love**

Jesus spoke to certain men of His day who thought their religious activities could purchase their way to Heaven. They were busily engaged in a study of Scriptures because they thought the act of searching the Scriptures would assure their place in Heaven (John 5:39). They did not accept that the Scriptures taught about Jesus. He said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (verse 40). They wanted eternal life on their own terms. Because of their failure, they had no promise of eternal life. If they had only been willing to trust in Jesus Christ, they could have been saved. Through Him they could have "passed from death unto life" (verse 24).

In the lesson Text, the Lord promised believers eternal life and gave assurance that they would never perish (John 3:16). Those terms speak of security in salvation. This is a certain promise given by God. Many Scriptures assert that promise. Jesus gave an illustration of the believer's security when He said, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one" (John 10:28-30). Since God has promised eternal life to believers, no power can wrest them from His hands. They are as secure as the promises of God.

Conclusion

Salvation is not a matter of hope or wish. The promise of God gives assurance that all who trust in Jesus will receive eternal life. Because of the relationship believers have in Christ, they need not worry about what the future holds. The children of God will always have a place with Him. They can have confidence in the Lord because His Word is sure. Do not doubt. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

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The Promise of Security

APPLICATION

To show that eternal life is God's promise to His children.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: John 10:27-30.

Related Scripture: Matthew 25:46; Mark 10:29, 30; Luke 18:29, 30; John 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 17:2, 3; Romans 6:22; Galatians 6:8; 1 Timothy 1:16; 6:12; Titus 1:1, 2; Hebrews 5:9; 9:12; 2 Peter 1:11, 12; 1 John 5:13; Jude 24.

Devotional Reading: Nothing Can Eternally Separate the Believer from God, Romans 8:35-39.

Introduction

What does security mean? A person approaching retirement might reply that security is having invested enough money during the working years so the individual has sufficient funds for the years of retirement. A person who has been the victim of crime might consider security a good electronic system to make sure the bad guys cannot get in. A person in the workforce might view security as being indispensable on the job. All of these are examples of physical security in the world today. Even if a person has some security in the world, what is its value when viewed in light of eternity? The world can offer no assurance about what is to come in eternity.

God wants His people to have a sense of security. This does not mean a sense of self-worth or self-importance. Instead, it means they should know where their relationship stands with God. If they are children of God, then, they have a confidence about what the future holds. God offers the promise of spiritual security.

How can a person feel secure in salvation? There must be some basis for his feeling of safety. It is like a quarterback standing in the backfield waiting to throw the football. He feels safe because of men standing before him walling off the opposition. What is the basis for the believer's security? It comes in several areas.

There is the promise of God's Word. In the Text chapter, Jesus described the work of the Good Shepherd. A shepherd has the responsibility of watching over the the sheep and protecting them from danger. Jesus compared that work with His own. He is the Good Shepherd who watches over His spiritual flock. He gives each believer "eternal life" (John 10:28). This speaks of life without end. The apostle John had a purpose in his writings. He wanted to demonstrate the deity of Christ. He often quoted Christ's using the phrase *eternal life*. This showed His eternal deity. Only God could give something that is eternal and that was what Christ promised. He promised eternal life to all who trust in Him. It is as certain as the character of God.

Another basis of security is the power of God. Jesus showed how salvation was secure. It was not certain because of a person's natural ability. Salvation is completely based on the power of God. The security of salvation is likewise based on His power. Jesus gave an illustration. It was of a person with some possession in his hand. That possession was secure because he was holding it and no one could wrest it from him. Now suppose someone stronger came along and might have the ability to steal it away. What then? Jesus declared the possession of believers not only rested in His mighty strength, but also in the power of the Father. "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:29). He claimed omnipotence for His Father. No one would have power to fight against God and steal away His children. To make the matter even more certain, Jesus declared, "I and my Father are one" (verse 30). In essence Jesus was saying, "We work together to hold believers secure in salvation. No one and nothing has the power to steal them away." The power of God works to hold believers secure in salvation.

2. _____

The Assurance of Security

God never wants His children to merely hope they possess eternal life. He wants them to have certainty about their relationship with Him. He gave many Scriptures to help with this assurance.

Paul wrote about the certainty God's children can have in salvation. He asked the question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35). Is there anything that can come between God and His children? Is there anything that can break that relationship? The answer was given in following verses. "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (verses 38, 39). Nothing created, nothing in existence and nothing imagined have the power to steal away one's relationship with the Father. It is as certain and sure as the love of God. His love stands as assurance of the continued relationship.

John also wrote about the assurance God's people can have. "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13). Believers can *know* they possess eternal life. The word given for "know" has the idea of seeing, perceiving and knowing. It is more than basic information. It is the depth of knowledge and full comprehension. One's salvation is not a matter of hoping to possess it. It is full knowledge. It is accepting what God has said and being assured by it. Too many people merely hope they are saved. A person can know he is saved. Paul put it in these terms. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:16). God wants all of His children to have this assurance.

3. _____

The Challenge of Security

As Jesus described His ministry as that of being the Good Shepherd, He also spoke of the role the sheep were to play. Since they know they are God's sheep, they are to do certain things.

They are to hear His voice. Earlier in His illustration, Jesus spoke of the sheep being in the "sheepfold" (John 10:1). This was an enclosure where the sheep were taken for safety and protec-

tion. Many different shepherds could bring their sheep to the same place. The next morning, the shepherd would stand at the gate to the enclosure and call his sheep. They knew his voice so they would come to the sound. Only those who knew the voice of their shepherd would follow him. The others would remain where they were until their shepherd called out. This is a dramatic challenge to the people of God. They must recognize the voice of God. When reading Scriptures, they need to understand what God is saying to them. His voice has been clearly given. His sheep will hear and harken to His words.

They are to follow the Shepherd. As the shepherd took his lambs out to the pastures, they carefully followed his steps. They were basically helpless on their own. They needed his guidance for safety and provision. Because of the need, they followed the shepherd. Christ has left an example for His people to follow. They have been called to “follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). He will always go in the right direction. The sheep need to get their rebellious hearts out of the way and begin following Him. All He does is for the good of His flock. Its challenge is to do what He wants.

Conclusion

Security is important to life. People want to know what will happen in days to come. In reality, there is no physical security on earth. This life will continue for a time and then will end. That is the only certain thing earthly life holds. This does not mean a person can have no assurance for the future. What we must do is realize that all assurance for eternity comes from the Lord. If we are to have any hope after this life, it will come as we have trusted Jesus as Savior. He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). If you want to have assurance in salvation, it will only come through Him. He is the One who gave eternal life. He is the One who holds us secure in it. “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

The Promise to His Church

APPLICATION

To show the promise of Jesus that His churches will endure the attacks of Satan.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Matthew 16:18; 28:18-20.

Related Scripture: Matthew 21:22; Luke 18:8; Acts 20:28; Romans 7:4; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 3; 6:11; 2 Corinthians 8:1; Ephesians 2:20; 3:21; 4:8-16; 5:23-32; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 3:15.

Devotional Reading: Jesus Promised His Power and Presence To Be with His Church, Matthew 28:18-20.

Introduction

Anytime a discussion of “the church” arises, one must first define the terms. Many religions define the church as being composed of all the saved. This disagrees with what the Bible teaches. The church Jesus established is always a local assembly of baptized believers who gather for the purpose of fulfilling the demands of Christ in His Great Commission. This was the kind of body Christ established on earth, and it is the kind of church that exists today.

Another important point concerns when the Lord established His church. It happened during His earthly, personal ministry. He personally called out certain disciples to follow Him. They formed the nucleus of that early church. How can we know the church existed prior to Pentecost? He set the apostles in the church during His earthly ministry. (Compare Mark 3:14-19 and 1 Corinthians 12:28.) For them to hold offices in the church, it had to be in existence. The Lord also gave His disciples

instructions for church discipline (Matt. 18:15-18). It would be impossible for a nonexistent body to exercise discipline upon its members. Nearing the end of His earthly ministry, the Lord established the ordinance of the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19, 20). Prior to His ascension, Jesus issued marching orders to His church. Members were to go throughout the world preaching the gospel (Mark 16:15). These orders would occupy His churches throughout their history. All these things prove that the Lord established His church during His earthly, personal ministry.

Jesus knew His churches would face terrible persecution. The book of Acts revealed some of what those faithful people endured for the cause of Christ. The years that followed the completion of Scripture were no better. For much of church history, God's people have been called upon to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). Everywhere the followers of Christ were scattered, they suffered persecution. Enduring such difficult days was not easy. The Lord offered a wonderful promise to His churches that remains in force today.

1. _____ **The Purpose of His Church**

Why did the Lord establish His church upon the earth? Sometimes people seem to think He merely wanted a social club for people to attend. The Lord's church has a far higher purpose than being something to fill one's schedule. It has the function of bringing Him honor and glory. "Unto him [God] be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:21). Everything done by a church must have that as its motive for service. When a church becomes engaged in activities to be busy, it is not functioning as the Lord wants. To the church at Thyatira the Lord wrote, "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first" (Rev. 2:19). This was a church with many activities. The members continued to do things. The problem was that they had neglected to hold on to the Lord. The doctrine in that church had begun to slip (verse 20). Since the Lord is the ultimate expression of truth, a church slipping away from truth will not bring Him glory. Each church must seek to honor Him in all it does.

One way to bring Him glory is to be obedient to His commission. When He ascended back to His Father, Jesus told His

church to go into the world preaching the gospel to all people. The church was to baptize those who received the gospel and were saved. Then, it was to instruct those who were baptized into its fellowship. Church members who do not obey the Lord in these matters are not honoring Him. Each church must faithfully obey Him to give Him proper glory.

In all of its activities, whether in matters of outreach or worship, a church should lift up the name of Jesus. When dealing with those outside the fellowship of a church, the membership must be that shining light which draws people to Him (Matt. 5:14-16). A light shining in a dark night will attract many insects. A godly light shining in a darkened world will attract people to Him. God's churches need to be that light.

2. _____ **The Promise of His Protection**

Early followers of Christ paid dearly for their faithfulness. Even the apostles had to endure much opposition. They often helped those in need. A lame man sat outside the Temple begging. Some who passed by tossed in tokens of their wealth. Peter and John passed by with nothing of this world's goods. The lame man called out for help. Peter looked intently on him and said, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). The man was healed immediately. Instead of rejoicing over the good done to the helpless man, the religious leaders grew angry because Peter gave glory to Jesus. Peter and John were arrested, beaten and threatened. They were persecuted because they served the Lord.

The Lord had already given them assurance that they would have strength to serve in spite of what might come. He spoke of His church as facing the gates of hell. However, the gates of hell could not prevail against His church (Matt. 16:18). Satan has a bitter hatred for everything that pertains to God. Since the church is the body of Christ, Satan hates every scriptural congregation. He seeks to find ways to overcome and defeat it. He might do so by bringing into the congregation those who believe false doctrines. He might do so by bringing great trials to the people. One church had its sanctuary collapse and waited well over a year before it could begin the rebuilding process. Satan wants to defeat churches and members of churches. He

is like “a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The Lord has promised to protect His churches against the onslaughts of the wicked one. Though Satan bitterly hates each church, he does not have power over it. If the churches will trust the Lord and follow Him, they can have victory. The minions of Satan cannot have dominion over the Lord’s churches.

3. _____ **The Promise of His Presence**

When people face uncertainty, having the presence of their leader around gives encouragement. When Jesus issued His commission to the church, He concluded His charge with words of encouragement. “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20). This echoed a promise from the Old Testament. The Lord spoke to Joshua as he took leadership of Israel saying, “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Joshua 1:5). When churches face days of uncertainty, they could have assurance because the Lord promised to be with them. How would He fulfill this promise?

The Lord wanted His disciples to press toward the future with confidence knowing they would not be left alone. It was certain that He would depart from them. However, it was beneficial to them for Him to depart. When He left, He would send to them the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). The presence of God through the Holy Spirit would never be removed from His churches. While Jesus was physically on earth, He could only be in one place at a time. When He departed and the Holy Spirit came to empower the churches, He could be with every church at the same time. It truly was *expedient*—good and profitable.

Churches today have the same promise of the presence of God. Jesus declared, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Every church has the guarantee that Jesus is with it through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This gives a church the incentive to press on in service.

4. _____ **The Promise of His Power**

The Lord is present with churches to protect and encourage them. They also have a task set before them. How can they have the power to do what God wants?

The Lord gave instructions to His church. “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The word *power* speaks of dynamic ability or strength to perform a task. He would grant the churches the ability to accomplish the work. Considering the enormity of the task—reaching the world with the gospel—the effort seems impossible from a human viewpoint. Why would He assign such a difficult, overwhelming work? He expected His people to rely on Him. While it might be impossible through human effort, the work can be accomplished when churches rely on Him. He wanted to furnish the power needed to reach the world with the gospel. Then, it becomes His work and He receives the glory. Rather than becoming intimidated by the task at hand, churches should simply begin doing what they can. Then, they can trust the Lord to make their meager efforts into some truly worthwhile. He will do the work through His churches.

Conclusion

Are difficult days over? Will churches face persecution in days to come? In the United States, churches have relative freedom to conduct their business as they choose. This is not true everywhere in the world. Some Christians face persecution if they choose to stand for Jesus Christ. They can have victory as they trust the Lord. This does not mean they will no longer face persecution. Remember, even the apostles were persecuted for Christ. This glorious promise gives the assurance that, even though we might face harshness, the Lord will see us through. We must trust Him. Then, we will press forward for His honor and glory.

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The Promise of the Comforter

APPLICATION

The promise of Christ is that He would not leave His church without spiritual leadership.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: John 16:7-15.

Related Scripture: Joel 2:28, 29; Matthew 3:11; Luke 24:49; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; Acts 1:4, 5, 8; 8:14-17; 10:44-47; 11:1-16; Revelation 2:5.

Devotional Reading: The Holy Spirit Came in a New Capacity To Fill the Vacancy of Jesus in Leading His Church, Acts 2:1-21.

Introduction

The work of Jesus Christ while on earth was special and far-reaching. He had the responsibility of providing the way of salvation to all people. As He conducted this work, Jesus also established His church to be the tool by which the gospel story would be spread to the world. All people needed to hear about Jesus. This was a mighty task assigned to the Lord's churches. How could they possibly accomplish their task? It could only be done by the power of God. Since Jesus ascended to Heaven, who would fill the role of empowering the Lord's churches? That work would fall on the shoulders of the Holy Spirit, or as Jesus called Him, the Comforter.

Some people have the mistaken idea that the Holy Spirit is unique to the New Testament. From the beginning of history, the work of the Holy Spirit was revealed. In the creation, the Scriptures reveal that "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). The word *moved* has the idea of brooding, moving or shaking. It is the picture of a mother hen brooding

over her baby chicks. She will flutter her wings to keep them close. The Holy Spirit had compassion on the creation even as it was coming into being. His concern was evident throughout the Old Testament. When the people of Israel had been delivered from Egyptian bondage, the Lord commanded them to build a place of worship. The Holy Spirit moved on the heart of Bezaleel helping him know how to do what God wanted (Ex. 31:1-3). This compassion helped the people of Israel have their center of worship. Many years later, when Israel had gone into Babylonian captivity, the Holy Spirit cared so much for the people that He empowered Ezekiel to bring them a message from God (Ezek. 2:1-4).

The work of the Holy Spirit has expanded in New Testament days. He still draws people to salvation, but He also has a special work in churches. This lesson will examine the expanded work of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter promised by Christ.

1. _____ **The Meaning of Comforter**

The word Jesus used to describe the office and work of the Holy Spirit is *Comforter*. It comes from a compound word meaning “to call alongside.” It includes such ideas as encouragement, consolation, admonition and exhortation. The form in the lesson Text is used only five times in the New Testament. Four times it is used in the gospel of John describing the Holy Spirit. The other time *was* also used by John in his first letter. There it is translated *an advocate*—a legal counselor in a court. It means “one who pleads the cause of someone else.”

Jesus told the disciples of His coming demise. Though they did not fully understand what He had said, they would realize the truth soon. Jesus did not want them to face those days alone. He gave them the promise of One to come and comfort them. “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16). He would depart from them physically, but the Holy Spirit would take His place. He would be “another Comforter.” The word Jesus used said the Holy Spirit would be another Comforter who would be like the first. “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (verse 18). When the Holy Spirit came upon them for power and

comfort, it would be the same as when Christ was with them. They would continue in the same work.

2. _____ **The Work of the Comforter**

Jesus said the Holy Spirit would “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). The three ideas presented here show a portion of the work He performs as the Comforter. The word *reprove* means “to rebuke for wrong.” It includes the shame the person should feel for doing wrong. This indicates there are certain things in the world for which people should feel shame. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to point these matters out in the heart of the individual.

The Holy Spirit convicts “of sin, because they believe not on me” (verse 9). Sin is any violation of God’s Laws. In this particular case, the primary sin under consideration is the unbelief most people have concerning Jesus. They might look at Him as a good man, even a moral man, but they do not really accept that He is the actual Son of God. Jesus once asked His disciples what people thought about Him. They replied that many people thought He was one of the great Old Testament prophets. This was high regard for Him, but it was wrong. Their sin was in not believing that Jesus was who He claimed to be, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. The same is true today. People might have a high opinion of Jesus, but do they really believe He is the Son of God? If they did, they would repent of their sins and trust Him as Savior. Their continued refusal to do so shows a sinful heart. The Holy Spirit will convict of sin because of unbelief.

The Holy Spirit convicts “of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more” (verse 10). This speaks of guiltiness. What righteousness does any person have? No one can claim to have true righteousness because “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). This natural guiltiness separates people from God. Christ went to the cross and died as the sacrifice for sin. He remained in the grave three days and three nights and then arose from death. He did all this so we might have the opportunity to be saved. The world needs to be convicted of righteousness because it has none. Jesus Christ became sin for us that we might have His righteousness placed on our account (2 Cor. 5:21). This is justification. The believer is made righteous through the blood of the Lamb (Rom. 3:24).

The Holy Spirit convicts “of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:11). This is a most difficult thought. God has announced judgment on the world. How can anyone know this of a certainty? Jesus said it could be understood “because the prince of this world is judged” (verse 11). Satan is already condemned. Since the day he rebelled against God and sought to supplant Him in His position, Satan has been condemned. Since he beguiled Eve and convinced Adam to eat what God had forbidden, he has been condemned. God looked at the deceptive snake and declared that the Messiah would crush his head (Gen. 3:15). When Jesus hung on the cross and died in bitter agony, Satan might have thought he had finally won, but that was the full expression of his defeat. Three days later, Jesus came out of the grave victorious over death and sin. Satan was the defeated foe. As surely as Satan is defeated, those who reject Jesus stand defeated. They might not realize it yet, but the Holy Spirit is convicting them.

These works of the Comforter deal mostly with those who are lost. They are in need of Christ as their Savior. The Holy Spirit persistently draws them to Jesus, convicting them of their need. He wants all people to be saved.

3. _____ **The Instruction of the Comforter**

A work the Holy Spirit performs among the people of God is that of being their instructor. Some people think that they are automatically granted spiritual knowledge at the point of salvation. This is not true. All information must be gained in some manner. This is one work of the Holy Spirit.

Part of the education process is for the believer to grow. The Lord spoke of His disciples as not being ready to receive some of what they needed to know. When the time was right and when they were mature enough to receive it, the Holy Spirit would help them receive it. The guidance He gives will always be toward the truth. He never misleads or gives people faulty information. News programming or newspapers are often biased toward the reporter’s prejudices. This means the information is not completely accurate. Some might be slanted in the wrong direction. This never happens with the Holy Spirit. He always gives credible information. It can be trusted because God cannot lie.

Another aspect of His instruction is what He says about Jesus. In some religions, the primary emphasis is on the works of the Holy Spirit. They want to talk about miracles of the Holy Ghost, being slain in the Spirit and other matters. This all draws attention to the Holy Spirit. While He is God and is deserving of our honor, He never seeks to draw attention to Himself. Jesus described the Comforter by saying, “He shall not speak of himself;...He shall glorify me” (John 16:13, 14). When any religion draws attention away from Christ, it is not following the leadership of the Holy Spirit. He always honors the Lord.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit is our Comforter. This is a glorious promise. In a world of danger and doubt, it is good to have the Comforter in our lives. In churches facing difficulty and trauma, it is a blessing to know the Comforter is there with strength and help for every situation. Each church and each believer can enjoy God’s leadership in their lives. They must be willing to yield to Him in all areas. He is the all-knowing God. He will never lead us in the wrong path. We can be thankful for the promise we have of the Comforter.

The Promise of Christ's Return

APPLICATION

To show Christ will return for His saints as He promised.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Acts 1:9-11.

Related Scripture: Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:31; Luke 21:25-28; John 6:62; 14:1-6; Acts 1:1, 2; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 1 John 3:1-3; Revelation 1:7.

Devotional Reading: Christ Promises To Return with His Saints at the End of the Tribulation Period, Mark 13:24-27.

Introduction

The old hymn declares, “Jesus is coming, is coming, is coming; Jesus is coming again. My heart is so happy; my soul is so glad, for Jesus is coming again” (words by James M. Gray). Many songs through the years have proclaimed the fact of the Lord’s return. Yet, it seems by most people’s lives that the return of the Savior is the furthest thing from their minds. They continue in life as though nothing will ever change. This is a reflection of what the Scriptures teach the times leading up to the Lord’s return. “But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matt. 24:37-39). Life continues on without a concern for the future because people have not really embraced the promise of the Lord’s return.

Throughout the pages of His book God spoke of His coming reign. Old Testament prophets looked forward to the day when the Messiah would reign. They knew He would take control of the earth, bring judgment on all people and would be the eternal King. Daniel foretold of the day when “the Son of man” would come in the clouds and would stand before “the Ancient of days” (Dan. 7:13). He would have “dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (verse 14). Isaiah spoke of the child born to Israel to whom the government would be given (Isa. 9:6). “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom” (verse 7). Other prophets told how the Messiah would reign for eternity.

For the Messiah to reign upon His throne, He must first come to earth. This happened when Jesus was born to the virgin Mary. He was called, “Emmanuel” which means “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). He lived a perfect life, was crucified as the payment for sin, arose from death and ascended to the Father. He is presently sitting at the right hand of God awaiting the time of His return to earth. His second coming is the focus of this lesson.

1. _____ **The Promise of His Return**

How can people have assurance that the Lord will return to earth? Surely, the span of years since His departure indicates He will not be coming. This was an argument given by certain scoffers in the days of the New Testament. “Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:4). They had not seen any evidence of Jesus coming back, so they assumed He never would return. They were willingly ignorant of the truth. The Bible gives ample evidence of the Lord’s return. The proof comes by way of promises made. These are far more than the mere words of some human. They carry the weight of God’s character upon them.

Jesus Himself promised to return to earth after His departure. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus met with His disciples to celebrate Passover. During the celebration, Jesus spoke of His coming betrayal. He would be tortured and killed. The dis-

ciples were heartbroken. Peter swore he would defend Jesus to the death if necessary. Jesus spoke words of encouragement. He would depart from them, but they need not be overwhelmed with thoughts of despair (John 14:1). Though they would be without His presence for a while, it would not be an eternal separation. As surely as He would depart, He would return to take them into His presence. “Where I am, there ye may be also” (verse 3). This was not some platitude intended to keep them from being sad. It was a statement of certainty. He would return. He had given the promise.

The messengers (two angels) from God also gave a promise concerning the return of the Savior. Their words came immediately following the ascension of the Savior. The disciples had seen Him disappear into the clouds. They were mesmerized at the sight. They could not stop watching. As they gazed intently into the sky, the angels spoke to them. “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). This was God’s message for God’s people. He wanted them to have assurance for the future.

The promise of the Lord’s return is not subject to the whims of human imagination. It springs from the heart of God. He gives it to us so we can have confidence as we face the future. We can rest in the promises of God.

2. _____

The Time of His Return

When will the Lord return? It is common for people to seek answers. They read certain passages of the Bible and think they reveal precisely when Jesus will come again. No one can determine the exact moment of His coming. When discussing some of the signs pointing toward His return, Jesus said, “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matt. 24:36). Any precise prediction given by human intellect will prove to be untrue. No one can determine the date and the hour of the Lord’s coming. Since this is true, why bother with examining signs pointing toward His return? God’s people should be living in light of the coming of Christ.

The Lord instructed His disciples on events that would take place surrounding the end of the age. He wanted to prepare them for days ahead. He spoke of many things that would be

normal parts of human activity. People would endure religious pursuits, national conflicts, geological upheavals and vast epidemics. These have always existed and will continue to do so until the Lord returns. He implied these matters will intensify and increase as the final days approach. He went on to describe how people would become so enamored with sin that their love for God would grow colder and colder. This indicates Christian people would be swept up in the worldliness around them. Are these things happening today? The world seems to be closer to the description given by Christ than at any other time in history. The growth of sin in the world is certainly correct. The world cares more about sin than they do about morality. This worldliness has overtaken many who call themselves Christians. Many religions today are promoting biblical abominations as being acceptable, alternate life-styles. Their love for truth has definitely grown colder. Churches should carefully examine their behavior, their beliefs and their practice to make sure they are following the pattern set forth by God.

The Lord's return to earth will only come at the appropriate time. When He came the first time, it was in "the fulness of the time" (Gal. 4:4). When He comes again, it will be at the exact moment determined by the Father. God's people should live in anticipation of that day.

3. _____ **The Challenge His Return Gives**

One aspect of the Lord's return concerns the judgment. Sometimes Christians think that judgment is a subject only for the lost. They have rejected Jesus and are condemned to eternal punishment. This is true, but it does not mean God's people will not give an account of how they lived on earth. This report will include even the idle words they speak (Matt. 12:36) and the secret matters of life (Eccl. 12:14). God's hope in this judgment is to grant rewards for faithful service.

Jesus spoke a parable of a master who was traveling to a distant land. He called his servants together and disbursed his goods to them. They were to use them for the master's benefit while he was away. When he returned, he called his servants together to see what they had done. One servant had received five units of money. He doubled the value of the money. Another servant had received two units of money. He also doubled his

money. The third servant had received only one unit of money. He was fearful and nervous, so he dug a hole and buried his treasure. The master was pleased with the faithful servants. He was not happy with the servant who had done nothing. (This parable is taught in Matthew 25:14-29.)

The day will come when every child of God will stand before the righteous Judge to give an account of his life. Will He be pleased with the accounting given? Someone has said, “Only one life, so soon it is passed, only what’s done for Christ will last.” This is what will count in the presence of the King.

Conclusion

The Lord really is coming again. While no one knows the exact day or hour of His return, it is true nonetheless. How will we live in anticipation of that day? Our lives must have meaning. The day will soon come when we will stand before Him to give an account of our lives. Will we be able to stand before Him with confidence of our lives given to Him, or will we be ashamed of our conduct while on earth? May we be so moved by the knowledge of His return that our lives will begin to count for Him.

The Promise of Answered Prayer

APPLICATION

To show how God answers the prayers of His people.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: John 14:13, 14; 1 John 5:14.

Related Scripture: Genesis 32:9-12; 2 Kings 4:33-35; Psalm 118:5; Isaiah 58:9; Jeremiah 29:12; Matthew 7:7; 21:22; Luke 11:1-13; Ephesians 6:18; Hebrews 4:16; James 4:3; 5:17, 18; 1 John 1:9.

Devotional Reading: Evidence of God Answering Prayers, Psalm 99:6.

Introduction

Have you ever had a one-sided conversation? This would be trying to have a conversation with someone who simply will not respond to any attempt to draw him out. It is difficult to continue talking to someone who never says anything.

Some people think prayer is like that kind of conversation. They see no need to talk with God because they see Him as not having one bit of concern about what happens on earth. Such a perception is wrong. Throughout the Bible, He is portrayed as the loving God who cares deeply about His people. The Bible gives many examples about people who were at the heart of God.

Job was one such example. He was a godly man who cared about how his family and responded to God. The Lord allowed trauma to enter his life. Job felt that God was aloof from his troubles. He could not see the hands of God working in the events of his life. Yet, at the end of the story, Job came to realize that God really did care and was watching over His child.

Another example of one who was in the thoughts of God was David. As a young man, the Lord chose him to be the next king of Israel. There were times when it appeared God had forsaken him. King Saul wanted him dead. David had the advantage of God's concern. God watched over David and protected him from harm. God really did care.

We can have assurance that God listens to the pleas of the saints. He promised He would listen to and answer prayers. Along with this promise are some guidelines to help prayer be more effective and powerful. If we want prayers that produce results, we must be willing to follow His principles.

1. _____ **Prayers Reveal Our Needs**

There are various reasons to pray. One portion of prayer must be to give Him praise through thanksgiving. When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He began His example by saying, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9). He told His disciples to esteem God. Such an expression is worship and praise. This aspect of prayer is often neglected. But praise is certainly not the only reason to pray. God's people often face days of difficulty and need. They should willingly bring those petitions to God.

Some people counter this idea by saying, "God already knows our needs and burdens. Why bother to pray?" It is true that God knows all that happens in the lives of His people. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus stated, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:8). It was following that statement where Jesus gave the Model Prayer. Jesus prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread" (verse 11). If there is no need to ask for things God already knows, why give that example?

It is beneficial to pray because it focuses the attention on people's inability to meet their own needs. They might work hard to provide their daily requirements, but in reality, it is God who gives the blessings. The prophet Haggai preached to those who had returned from Babylonian captivity. They had built their houses and planted their crops. What they had forgotten was to honor God. Haggai said they would plant crops but not

reap enough to eat. What they earned was put in bags with holes (Haggai 1:6). They did all the work necessary to survive, but God was working against them. People today need to remember it is God who gives blessings. Every good thing in life has God as its source (James 1:17). When God's people pray, it reminds them of the One who blesses them. It causes them to rely on Him.

As long as people think they are supplying everything for themselves, they will not rely on God. They will become selfish and unthinking. It is better to realize what God is doing and simply trust Him.

2. _____

Prayers Should Be According to God's Will

It is vital for God's people to bring their petitions to Him. Sometimes people think they can get what they want without consideration about how they should pray or what they should request. Jesus' instructions concerning prayer teaches people to pray according to God's will.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray "in my name" (John 14:13, 14). In this instance, it means far more than ending a prayer by saying, "In Jesus' name I pray. Amen." Praying in the name of Jesus means to claim His authority, character, power and rank. The prayer must be according to His purpose or direction. John wrote for people to pray "according to his will" (1 John 5:14). Prayers should not be frivolous or trivial. They are communication with God. This is far more impressive than standing in the presence of some government official. When people pray, they should seek God's will and focus on His purpose in all matters.

Again there are objections to this idea. "If it is God's will, He will merely do it." Consider the prophet Jonah. God called him to travel to Nineveh to preach concerning its coming destruction. Jonah refused to do so. With the help of a whale, God convinced him to go and preach. When he finally preached to Nineveh, the people of that wicked city repented and God preserved them. Jonah was upset. He knew that would happen because God is merciful (Jonah 4:1, 2). It was God's will all along for those people to repent. He wanted Jonah to obey and do His work. In prayer, God wants to accomplish His will. He wants His people to be aware that He has a purpose for all things. Prayer is part of His plan for completing His work.

Jesus also promised, “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14). He answers every prayer according to His will. This means not every prayer will receive the answer people want. Sometimes He will refuse certain things because He does not want them to happen. It is the responsibility of God’s people to accept His will.

How can prayer really become effective? James offered a formula for effective prayer. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). Effective prayer produces bountiful results. For a prayer to be productive, the one praying must be righteous. Some people only think of righteousness as what they get in salvation. Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the believer. After salvation, people must let His righteousness influence their lives. Letting Him be in control of our lives is the key to righteous living. Such a person can have productive prayers.

The method of praying is also described. It must be an “effectual fervent prayer” (verse 16). Prayer should be more than an intellectual exercise. People must be energetic in prayer. Someone has said people need to put feet on their prayers. This means to pray diligently for something. Then, they must seek the answer while trusting God to grant the request. What good does it do to pray for people to be saved when we are not willing to tell them about Jesus? We should share how they can be saved. Then, we trust God to work on their hearts. It will always be God who answers their prayers.

Conclusion

Prayer is vital in our lives. A joyful aspect of prayer is the promise Christ gave concerning His willingness to hear and answer our prayers. He is not standing aloof from us. The Old Testament word for *grace* has the root meaning, “to stoop down in kindness to an inferior to bestow favor upon them.” This shows what God is willing to do for us. We do not deserve to come into His presence. Yet, He condescends to help us and answer our petitions. This promise should encourage a more active, faithful prayer life.

The Promise of His Word

APPLICATION

To show the Word of God will endure.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Psalm 119:160; Matthew 24:35.

Related Scripture: Isaiah 34:16; 51:6; Jeremiah 31:35, 36; Matthew 4:4; 5:18; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33; 24:27; John 7:42; Acts 1:16; Romans 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

Devotional Reading: God's Word Will Do What the Lord Intended, Luke 16:29-31.

Introduction

In any discussion of religious matters, it should be assumed those involved would believe that the Bible is the Word of God. It is sad to think there are those who call themselves “theologians” who do not accept this most basic of doctrinal truths. Instead, they look on religion as they do the disciplines of philosophy and biology. What they neglect or reject is the truth about Scriptures. The Bible is more than just the musings of human reasoning. It is the Word of God.

The Bible came to the human race through divine purpose. God inspired certain men to pen the books that compose the holy Scriptures. This means they are His thoughts rather than human thoughts. Peter described inspiration—“holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21). This phrase paints a picture of a sailboat on the water. It is carried along by the wind. It has no natural motive power but is dependent on the wind. Those penning Scriptures did not

write according to their own power. They were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The biblical word *inspiration* (2 Tim. 3:16) is a compound word meaning “God breathed.” Again this takes the control out of the hands of man. It is God who composed the Bible. It is His book, not man’s.

The Bible is God’s instruction manual for Christian living. In it, He gives directions on how to behave properly. He tells what He expects from His followers. Every child of God should dig into its pages so he can understand what is expected of him. The Bible will always be there to help those who search its pages.

1. _____

His Word Will Endure

The process of completing the Word of God took place over many centuries. The various writers from many ages were given the message God wanted His people to have. From the first book until the last, some fifteen centuries transpired. Through all of those ages, the central theme of the Bible remained unified. When God brought the inspiration of His canon to a close, His message was complete. It would stand as His Bible, His book of books.

The Bible has endured attacks in every generation. Many people do not want to accept the reality of biblical truth or of the supreme God. They would rather be accountable to no one but themselves. They want to destroy the validity of the Bible. Some so-called “scholars” have attempted to cast doubt on the Bible by dubious means. They have declared that the book of Daniel could not have been written by someone during the Babylonian captivity. The details of the prophecy are too precise. It must have been written after the events were completed. This approach ignores the fact of an Omniscient God. The Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote that, when Alexander approached Israel on his conquering march, the high priest met him and read the book of Daniel. He saw himself as the leopard with four wings conquering with swiftness (Dan. 7:6) and the he goat who conquered great territories (Dan. 8:5-7). These verses foretold of future events. Those who oppose the possibility of predictive prophecy also deny the true character of God. They are like the ancient Sadducees. They said “that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit” (Acts 23:8). There are many “religious leaders” who are right at home with the spirit of the Sadducees.

They do not want to believe anything spectacular about God or His message. Because of this, they attack the Bible.

Though all the world band together to reject the Bible as the Word of God, it will always endure. Jesus offered the promise given in the lesson Text. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Sometimes people receive what is called "dated mail." In it will be a limited time offer. For it to be valid, the offer must be accepted by a certain date. After that time, the offer is canceled. This does not happen with the Bible. It has no time restraints. Though the present creation will come to its end, the Bible will remain true and valid. It will not cease to exist. It is the eternal message of the eternal God.

2. _____

His Word Is True

God's Word is true. This word comes from a root meaning "lasting or enduring." It pictures a place so firm a peg can be driven into it and the peg be unmovable. It speaks of something being steadfast and trustworthy. This is a valid description of the Bible. It is unchanging and trustworthy. When the Bible declares something to be true today, it will remain true for all time.

The truth of Scriptures is shown in many ways. One way the Bible is proven to be correct is in the matter of fulfilled prophecy. Many places in the Old Testament God gave His men information about future events. Isaiah spoke of the coming captivity. He knew the people of Israel would continue their rebellion. He would bring punishment upon them. But he did not want to leave them without hope. God gave Isaiah information no human could know. After seventy years of captivity, a man named Cyrus would authorize the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and its Temple (Isa. 44:28). After their time in the foreign land, it was Cyrus, king of Persia, who issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their native land and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4). That far-fetched prophecy was proven true. Since God's prophecies are fulfilled, His message for humanity must have validity.

Since the Bible is true, it can be trusted in what it says. Too many people want to explain away clear teaching of Scripture. This is especially true when it comes to God's creation. Many people want to stand on the shifting sands of public opinion con-

cerning how the worlds came into existence. They rely on theories that can never be proven rather than the reliable words of God. People place more faith in untested scientific theory than they do in the proven Word of God. It is better to accept what God has said. He is the primary witness to what took place in creation. What He has declared is certainly more trustworthy than those who have seen nothing of the origin of the universe. God's message for humanity can be trusted.

This means the message the Bible gives concerning eternal salvation is the only true message. It is through Scriptures that God has revealed His plan for eternal life (2 Tim. 3:15). When people seek alternate plans to attain a relationship with God, they will fail. There is but one way, one truth and one life. The Bible declares that way to life only comes through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. There is no salvation in any other person (Acts 4:12).

Everything the Bible declares must be true. God would not give a false message to His people because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Since He is reliable and true, His Word is also true. It can be trusted.

3. _____ **His Word Is Righteous**

The judgments of God are declared righteous. This has the idea of something being morally right and correct. Since the Bible has been proven to be true, what it teaches must be morally upright. When Paul emphasized the inspiration of all Scripture, he also spoke of the benefit derived from it. It is profitable for "instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). It teaches the children of God how they should live.

Many people think they can live how they please and still have Christian lives. By definition, a Christian is one who is like Christ. How can those living in disagreement with God's Word think they are being like Christ? When Christ faced His time of temptation from Satan, He answered each trial in the same manner. When Satan said to turn the stones into bread to end His fast, the Lord began His reply by saying, "It is written" (Matt. 4:4). When Satan took Him to the pinnacle of the Temple and told Him to jump to prove His identity, the Lord answered, "It is written again" (verse 7). When the devil took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him the kingdoms of earth and

offered them to Him, Jesus replied, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written” (verse 10). The answers to the problems Jesus faced were handled by His knowledge of the Bible. The psalmist declared, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11). The Bible helps God’s people know what is wrong in their lives and how to correct it. God instructs godly, righteous living. Without the Bible, God’s people would have to guess how they should live.

Conclusion

The Bible is far more than a collection of the best writings of human experience. That would mean it was little more than the meandering thoughts of people through the ages. Instead, the Bible is the mind of God revealed to the human race. He watched over those who were engaged in penning its words. He would not allow even one wrong word to find its way into the canon. It is trustworthy and will not change.

How do you feel about the Bible? It is a valuable asset to those who want to live for Christ. Without its instruction, people would have no idea of what God wants. God has revealed His purpose and plan for Christian living. It is our responsibility to study what God says and then follow His commands. This will be evidence of our love for Him (John 14:15).



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The Promise of God's Care

APPLICATION

The Lord's promises are proof that He cares.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: Matthew 6:25-34.

Related Scripture: Genesis 28:15; Deuteronomy 20:4; 31:61; Joshua 1:5; 23:8-10; Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 30:10, 11; Psalm 37:5; Luke 12:22-30; Philippians 4:6; Hebrews 13:5; 1 Peter 5:6, 7.

Devotional Reading: God Provided for Elijah's Physical Needs, 1 Kings 17:1-16.

Introduction

Almost everyone goes through life with a little concern about meeting the needs of life. The world has been facing an economic downturn. The job market once appeared to be stable and secure. That is no longer the case. Few jobs are secure in a weak economic market. The concerns expressed in the verses of the lesson Text give assurance that God is in control of everything. God's people should keep their eyes on Christ and trust Him even when things are not looking good. He has given His promise to care for His own. This is a secure promise. It can be trusted. What Jesus said about the needs of life can encourage the people of God. His promise to care for His own will be the focus of this lesson.

1. _____

God's Care for Creation

A person works on some handicraft. When the project is completed, there is satisfaction over a job well done. The person

wants to take care of it because it is the work of his hands. God is the originator of all things. During the process of creating all things, God would look at the portion completed with satisfaction because “it was good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). When creation was completed, He looked over what He had accomplished and “behold, it was very good” (verse 31). Would He then walk away from His handiwork and let it fall apart? No, God continued to care for His creation.

Jesus talked about God’s hands in maintaining the creation. God cares for the birds (Matt. 6:26). They have their provisions from the Lord. Some people want everything to be explained by physical laws. They will say the birds maintain their patterns because of instincts learned over the eons. This does not explain how the patterns began. Something had to impress the bird with the need to migrate at a certain season. God formed the birds and set the patterns for their existence. This shows how much God cares for all of His creation.

Jesus also discussed how God cares even for flowers (verses 28-30). The lilies of the field grow in their season and have beautiful flowers. They do not work to obtain this ornamental covering. It is their nature. The beauty of a field of flowers surpasses any human creation. Driving down a Texas road while the blue-bonnets are blooming is an emotional sight. Mile after mile the beauty of God’s creation simply shines. The wildflowers of various regions fill the same role. These flowers were not planted by any human hand. They are the result of God’s handiwork and they magnificently proclaim His glory. Even the matchless splendor of Solomon in his great riches could not equal the beauty displayed in God’s creation. God cares enough for plants to provide them with beauty.

God is the Creator of all things. But He does not stop there. He also sustains everything. God formed all things, both visible and invisible. “All things were created by him, and for him” (Col. 1:16). It did not stop there. “By him all things consist” (verse 17). This means the Lord holds all things together. The forces of molecular cohesion are part of His Law. He works to maintain and preserve the universe. He will continue to do so until that final day of judgment when “the elements shall melt with fervent

heat” (2 Peter 3:10). He decreed its beginning and He will bring about its end. It is His creation.

2. _____

God's Care for Humanity

Jesus had explained God's concern for the physical universe. He wanted it to be treated with respect and honor because He created it for His majesty and glory. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psalm 19:1). Though God loves all of creation, there is a specific portion of what He made that holds a special place in His heart. That special creation is humanity. The Lord formed the earth to be inhabited. He wanted to have a race of people who could choose to give Him glory. God's preserving the universe gives hope that God will provide for people as well. Jesus took the two examples of God's provision for lesser parts of creation to show His disciples that God would never neglect to help them. His assessment of how God would act toward humanity was, “Are ye not much better than they?” (Matt. 6:26). God has always provided for His people.

When He brought the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, He did not abandon them in the wilderness. When they were without water, God instructed Moses to strike a certain rock. When he did, water sprang out of the rock to provide for the people (Ex. 17:6). When their food supply ran low, God sent manna for their food (Ex. 16:35). He even maintained their clothing and shoes during the forty year journey (Deut. 29:5). What greater care could have been provided for them? As they entered the Promised Land, God went before them to prepare the way. God cared for His people.

God continues to care for His people. He has made the promise, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). People might turn their backs on the Lord, but He will never forsake them. He cares for them and wants to meet their needs. This is shown in what He did to provide the way of eternal life. Since Adam had sinned and cast the entire human race into a state of sin, something had to be done to reconcile humanity to Him. God had a plan prepared. It would take a terrible sacrifice, but God's concern for His creation was such that He was willing to make the sacrifice (John 3:16). No greater love or concern could

be shown than what Christ did (John 15:13). God cares for humanity.

3. _____ **God's Care Is Sufficient for Our Needs**

The Lord was concerned that His disciples might fall back into the pattern of worldly anxiety. Uncertainty breeds fear. Economic conditions can cause people to worry rather than trust God. The Lord encouraged His disciples not to be overwhelmed with concern about daily needs.

Some people misunderstand what Jesus meant when He said, "Take no thought" about the necessities of life (Matt. 6:31). They think He meant for them to make no provision about how to supply the needs of their families. Jesus never wanted people to sit and do nothing, expecting everything simply to come to them. Paul warned the saints in Thessalonica, "If any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). So the instructions of Christ were not for His people to sit back and wait for others to provide for them. They were to go to work to earn their money. Then, they were to trust God to help them provide for their families.

Jesus also described how a father provides for his family. "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:9-11). A good parent will always try to provide for the needs of the family. God also cares for His children and wants to provide their needs. This does not mean they will get everything they want. He will supply those things that are necessary to live for Him.

4. _____ **God's Care Challenges Us To Serve**

Jesus gave assurance to His followers. They were naturally concerned about their future. Times were difficult and it was difficult to provide for their families. The Lord instructed them not to be overwhelmed with worry. God cared enough to help them each day. How would this truth impact their lives? They could relax from worry, but they could not cease from serving God. The Lord's instructions to them are challenging for God's people even today.

The key to living in light of God's care and provision is to make sure we put first things first. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). God's people must carefully keep their eyes focused on the Savior. One time during His ministry Jesus sent the disciples across the sea before Him. The wind blew against them so they had difficulty in the crossing. As they struggled, they saw someone walking across the water toward them. It was Jesus. Peter asked the Lord to let him walk on water. Jesus called him to come. As he walked toward Jesus on the water, Peter began to notice the waves and the wind. He took his eyes off Christ. He immediately began to sink. He cried out for help and the Lord lifted him up. He began to fail because he stopped focusing on Jesus. If people are going to live for Him, they must put Him and His work first. They must seek His will for their lives.

Conclusion

Peter gave the admonition to all saints, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7). There is no need to be overwhelmed with any circumstance in life. God cares for us. He wants to help us in our activities for Him. He wants to sustain us through the cares of life. The problem is that too many people refuse to turn loose of their anxieties. They hold them close and never let them go. God cannot help when we are unwilling to place our burdens upon Him. He has broad shoulders. We can cast all our cares and burdens upon Him because He intimately cares for us.

The Promise of Godly Wisdom

APPLICATION

To show that true wisdom and knowledge comes from God.

SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text: James 1:5.

Related Scripture: Exodus 28:3; 35:30-34; 1 Samuel 2:3; Job 28:28; Psalm 51:6; 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 4:5-13; 5:1, 2; 9:10; Daniel 2:19-23; Luke 2:52; 21:15; 2 Corinthians 1:12.

Devotional Reading: God Gave Solomon the Needed Wisdom To Lead Israel, 1 Kings 3:5-12.

Introduction

What is wisdom? To most people, wisdom and knowledge are synonymous terms. Biblically, the two terms have differences in meaning. Having knowledge is to have information. It has the idea of learning about something to the point of having some understanding about how it functions. It implies having received instruction and thereby knowing the science behind something. That is knowledge. In contrast to this, wisdom speaks about knowledge but also includes having the ability to make good choices. It is the ability to put knowledge into proper use. Knowledge understands how something works while wisdom has the spiritual application of such knowledge.

Godly wisdom is valuable in the service of God. When God delivered the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage, He brought them to Mount Sinai to receive instructions for their worship. He showed them how to construct a house of worship. The Tabernacle would be the center of spiritual life for the nation. For everything to be built correctly, God endowed Bezaleel and Aholiab with wisdom about how to construct everything in the

proper manner (Ex. 31:1-6). In this way the people of the nation would have a place of worship worthy of their God. Wisdom was essential in building the Tabernacle.

Another example of godly wisdom is shown in Adam. He had intellectual knowledge. When the Lord brought the animals and birds of the earth to him, Adam was able to give them names based on their appearance or character. This took great imagination and understanding. Yet, this man with such intellect was unable to put his knowledge into practical use. Satan approached and beguiled Eve. This act did not force Adam into his foolish decision. He failed to use wisdom in the choice to eat of the fruit. Intelligence and knowledge were not sufficient to make him do the right thing. He needed wisdom (the ability to apply knowledge to making good choices).

Wisdom is necessary for God's people to build lives pleasing to Him. If they conduct their lives according to human reasoning, they might be pleasing to the world but will never please God. They must seek God's wisdom for their lives to be beneficial to the Savior. This godly wisdom is promised to those who will ask for it.

1. _____

Wisdom Required

James began by saying, "If any of you lack wisdom" (James 1:5). This would indicate that wisdom is not naturally part of human intellect. Some people think that once they receive Christ as their Savior, they are naturally endowed with wisdom. They think they already have everything they need. This would be like trying to construct a house without a set of blueprints. A person could buy the lumber and nails, but how could he know the way everything goes together? There must be something to show the plan. Because a person wants to build a house does not mean he has the natural ability to do so. For the children of God to know how to live for Him, they must gain wisdom (knowledge coupled with the ability to properly apply it). Students in math class are taught the axioms of mathematics, but it takes more than mere head knowledge. It also takes the ability to apply that knowledge to solve problems.

Saul, the son of Kish, was a man with certain natural attributes and abilities. He was tall and handsome. He was the kind

of man people naturally respected. When the people of Israel demanded a king to rule over them, God granted their wish. He gave them the kind of man they wanted. Saul was the man. He had leadership capabilities and the respect to go with it. A group of Israelites were being afflicted. When Saul heard of it, he was angered and called the people of the nation to band together to defend them. He was successful in this battle. Yet, it was not long until another opportunity came for Saul. He had everything he needed to be successful as king. Instead, he began relying on his own abilities rather than trusting God. He had knowledge (the information to attack the enemy) but did not possess wisdom (spiritual application of knowledge). He made foolish choices and was rejected by God. He should have listened to the Lord.

God's people must become aware of what they lack. Having information about the Bible is good but is not enough. He wants us to have the ability to make right choices. This is where wisdom comes in. If anyone lacks wisdom, there is a solution to the problem.

2. _____ **Wisdom Requested**

When people realize their need for wisdom, then, the solution must be found. The solution is more than reading some self-help book. It is seeing the lack and seeking the answer from the proper source. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (James 1:5). God answers prayers. When there is a need for wisdom, the One to turn to is God. He is the giver of all good things. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (verse 17).

Wisdom is needed when people engage in service to God. How can they know what to do? Such understanding comes from Him through His Word. One reason God gave the Bible is for "instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The Lord wants to equip His servants to do His work. When they come to Him requesting wisdom, He will open their hearts and minds to the meaning of Scripture. The Bible will make them aware of their duties and will show how the will of God might be accomplished. Wisdom is granted as God's people ask Him for help.

The admonition to ask of God has the idea of a petition being presented from an inferior. It might be a request from a child to parent, a subject to a king or even a beggar to one passing by. The one in the lesser position sees the need and finds someone who can help. Those lacking wisdom must approach the source of all wisdom. God is the fullest expression of wisdom. "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD" (Prov. 21:30). Daniel understood the depths of God's understanding. He had received an answer to prayer that was impossible by human standards. That which a person could not do, God accomplished. In praise to God he declared, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: he revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him" (Dan. 2:20-22). Since it is God who possesses all knowledge, wisdom and understanding, any comprehension of spiritual matters will only come through Him.

3. _____ **Wisdom Received**

People might have information and earthly knowledge, but if they are to gain spiritual maturity and understanding, they must go to God. He is the Omniscient God. All wisdom resides with Him. When people are willing to ask God for help in the matter of spiritual wisdom, He will grant that request.

The request for wisdom is granted "liberally" (James 1:5). This word *liberally* has at least two meanings. It can mean generously. This means that God is not stingy when granting the request for wisdom and spiritual understanding. He wants His people to know the right way to live. He wants them on the path of righteousness. Why would He withhold what is needed for them to live for Him? He is generous and liberal in His gift of wisdom.

Another thought of the liberality of His giving is that of being single-minded. When His people show such concern for life as to ask for His help in knowing how they should conduct their lives, He is single-minded in pursuing an answer to their request. He will do what is necessary to bring them to the point of under-

standing. Sometimes this pursuit might involve things that are unexpected by the petitioner. Their spiritual growth might bring certain results they did not expect. Paul faced a “thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet” him (2 Cor. 12:7). It was not pleasant. It brought him difficulty. He asked God three times to remove the problem. God refused saying, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (verse 9). Because of this problem in life, Paul was strengthened in faith. He was able to endure all things for the cause of Christ. It was not expected nor desired, but it was used by God to help his growth and wisdom. Receiving God’s wisdom in that case was not easy, but it was beneficial.

Conclusion

The lesson Text began with the statement, “If any of you lack wisdom” (James 1:5). Does any person have sufficient wisdom for life? This would indicate a person who is totally mature and full of the ability to make right decisions. The only One who completely fulfills that description is Jesus Christ. He is perfect and whole in all areas. All others fall short of that glorious standard set by the Savior. This means we all are in need of further wisdom (the ability to use knowledge in a proper and spiritual manner). If we lack such wisdom, we are not left without hope. We can go to God in prayer, knowing He is willing and able to grant us His wisdom. May we always desire to understand Him better, so we might follow His plan for our lives.

