

Precious Promises

The text assigned in this lesson focuses our attention on the theme of this lectureship, God's Precious Promises. Peter wrote "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet. 1:4). The word "whereby" points to the source of these *precious promises*, which is through the "knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" of the previous verse. Thus, through the word of God revealed and confirmed by the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit, we have these "great and precious promises."

Our English word "mega" comes from the original word translated "great" in verse four. Thus, "exceeding great" properly conveys the apostle's thoughts. These promises are truly "great." Peter expands the greatness of God's promises by adding the very descriptive word "precious" (of great value or worth). Thus, an apostle of Christ affirms God's promises are both great (mega), and of great value or worth.

The promises of God are great in magnitude, that is, the extent or significance of them. They are far reaching in their importance and should grasp the attention of all people. These promises not only focus on this life, but even more important, they focus our attention on eternal life.

Promises – The Meaning Of And Their Importance

A promise is a statement of assurance a person will, or will not, do a specific thing or things. It is the indication of something to be realized in the future. The thing promised may be favorable in nature, as it is used in this lesson, but not necessarily so. Embedded in the word "promise" is the

idea of a "vow," a "pledge," or a "solemn declaration." A promise implies a "commitment," and an "obligation."

The motivating power of a *promise* depends largely upon the character and integrity of the person who makes the promise. You do not have to look far to find an individual who will promise anything to get what he wants, but they never fulfill his promise. On the other hand, all of us know someone whose word is their bond. When they promise something, they will fulfill it.

In this lesson, Jehovah is the promise giver. Truly, He has given *Precious Promises*. However, these promises can motivate only to the extent of the reliability of God to fulfill them. If we truly believe He has the power to bring them to fruition, they have the ability to motivate us. Therefore, the real question is: Can God accomplish that which He promised?

We speak of the One Who, in the beginning "created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The size of the universe can only be stated in words. It is, in my judgment, beyond the ability of man to fully comprehend the immensity of it. It humbles us when we understand that God simply spoke and where there was nothing, something (universe) existed.

Furthermore, everywhere you look you see the evidence of *design*, which of and by itself demands a designer. It is certain design cannot be explained as originating by accident. Design can not accidentally come from chaos.

For instance, natural flyers like birds, bats and insects outperform man-made aircraft in aerobatics and efficiency. This is the very reason engineers and scientists are studying these "natural flyers." They are trying to understand why they can do things man cannot do. Does anyone think for a moment this example of design transpired by mere chance? Contrary to atheistic evolution, design demands a designer. We affirm without fear of successful refutation, the God of the Bible is this Designer.

Two Immutable Things

God has given many "Precious Promises." Many of these are individually considered in this lectureship. However I want to focus on Paul's words to the Hebrew Christians.

The background of this epistle shows its recipients were undergoing a great trial of affliction because of their faith in Christ. They faced opposition by their fellow Jews, possibly by family members, even their own mate. Satan often uses such trials to weaken, even destroy a man's faith. Some Jewish Christians had already abandoned the faith of Christ and gone back into Judaism. Others were in various stages of weakness. This is the situation to which Paul directed this epistle.

In his desire to encourage Jewish Christians to remain faithful to Christ, he argues that Jesus was made (by God) High Priest after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 5:6, 10). He then directs their attention to the end result of those who turn from the Christ (Heb. 6:1-8). Next, he states he was persuaded better things of them, affirming that God was not unrighteous to forget their work and labor of love (Heb. 6:9-12).

He then injects into his desire to encourage the Jewish Christians an argument based upon God's promise to Abraham, which ultimately refers to the salvation in and by and through Jesus Christ. His affirmation is short, but extremely powerful.

Paul stated that God made a promise to Abraham and then swore by Himself "Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee" (Heb. 6:14). Consider the words of Paul which follow:

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God

to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us (Heb. 6:17-18).

Now, here is the basic thrust of his argument. God, desirous to shew the heirs of His promise to Abraham the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath (cf. verse 14). This resulted in two immutable (unchangeable, unalterable) things. First, Jehovah's oath to Abraham. Second, He swore by Himself because he could not swear by one greater than He. Now, if one adds to that the fact that God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2; Num. 23:19), it is a tremendously powerful thought.

Let us focus on this thought: (1) Jehovah cannot lie. (2) He gave a promise, (3) Because He could swear by none greater, He swore by Himself. Just how much more confidence could Jehovah instill in us than that which is given in this promise? I cannot think of a single thing He could have done to give us more confidence, to show us greater assurance, present to us any more certainty, or instill in us any greater optimism. Thus, we have as an anchor of the soul that great promise of salvation through Jesus Christ. It is *sure and steadfast*. What more could we ask?

Paul wrote to Titus of this very thing, saying "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2). There is absolute confidence that God is capable to fulfill this *Precious Promise*. John suggests the same thing when he wrote "And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (1 John. 2:25).

A *Precious Promise* is found Jesus' words when he said "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). We understand here Jesus speaks of the necessary things, not the things we would like to have. Our focus

is to be upon Him first, last, and always. The necessary things will be given.

Another *Precious Promise* is found in Paul's letter to the Christians in Ephesus. He wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Much emphasis is rightly placed upon the fact that all spiritual blessing are "in" Christ. However, we need to likewise emphasize that "all" blessing are found in Him.

Conclusion

Paul puts a crowning touch on our thoughts with these words, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). We must remember that these *Precious Promises* are not unconditional. They are for everyone who will come to God on His terms.

Since we have these promises, we are to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness. Then we are to strive to "perfect" holiness. This simply means we are to complete, accomplish, bring about "holiness" in our lives. This word comes from the root word which is translated "saint." Therefore, we are to present ourselves as one who is professing "saintliness." We have Precious Promises. Let us be sure we do not come short of a single one.

This tract is condensed from a lesson presented at the 27th Annual Mid-West Lectures, "God's Precious Promises." To hear or view the complete lesson go to www.kc-cofc.org/2009Lectures.htm or contact the 39th Street Church of Christ 15331 East 39th Street Independence, MO 64055-4240 USA

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