

Precious Promises (part 1)

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, I told you last week that in our study of Octavius Winslow's Precious Things of God, we skipped to the end, the last chapter on the precious death.
- Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints. And in doing so, we jumped over an earlier chapter that I have been saving for the end, which is the precious promises of God.
- If you turn to 2 Peter, it's interesting how many of the precious things in the scriptures are called such by the Apostle Peter.
- And we have another precious thing identified by him this morning. 2 Peter 1, 3 and 4. His divine power, God's divine power, has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.
- Through these, that is, through his own glory and goodness, he has given to us his very great and precious promises. So that through them, you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.
- [1 : 2 6] Now, all along in this study, I've taken broad liberties to include materials that are not found in Winslow's book. Sometimes adding more than other weeks.
- But in this study on the promises, I just want you to know that I'm drawing from many other resources besides Winslow's chapter on the precious promises. Spurgeon has a wonderful book about the promises.
- A.W. Pink, John Bunyan, the Dutch theologian, William O'Brockel, and Joel Beakey, and James LaBelle.
- Well, others, many good readings about the precious promises. So I just want you to know that I'm broadening out and we're going to be spending at least three weeks, Lord willing, on this subject.
- Now, some things are precious because they are rare. And you see that on the antique road show, that if an artist only made one lamp in this year, then that maybe goes up in value.
- [2 : 3 5] Or one painting, only so many paintings. The rarer they are, the more precious they are. Well, that's not the case with the promises of God. They are precious even though they are many.
- They're not few. They're many of them. And no matter how many promises of God there are, each one of them is precious. And they're precious because of what they are.
- The nature of a promise makes it precious. Now, shallow views of the promises will cause us to undervalue them. So it's my aim in this first lesson to make us treasure God's promises by understanding better what they are.
- To meditate on the nature of a promise from God. So let me seek to illustrate it this way. A family is together on family night watching a movie together in the living room.
- And during the commercial break, your little girl sees an advertisement about Disney World. And of course, the question comes up, Daddy, can we go to Disney World?

[3 : 48] And you answer in all the noncommittal ways you can think of. Well, that's a good idea. It's sure warmer there in Florida than it is here in December.

That would be fun, wouldn't it? What are you doing? You're beating around the bush, aren't you? And she knows it.

So she goes for the jugular. Daddy, do you promise? Do you promise we can go to Disney World?

Well, that gives you pause, doesn't it? Why is that? Why does that cause you to pause? Why is that a whole different matter? I want to hear from some of you evaders.

Some of you dads. Why is it different if they say, do you promise? Raj? We taught them to keep their promises.

[4 : 50] Commitment. Okay. You taught them to keep their promises. And now you're making one. You're making a commitment. Trust.

Trust. In what sense? The child is trusting you. Mmm. You don't want to betray that trust. So you're a bit ginger about what you promise and what you commit to.

Good. Anything else come to mind? Why is it different when we promise something rather than just talk around a subject? When we actually say, I will do this.

I will do that. I want to make sure you have the resources to be able to do it. You've got to pause and ask, do we have the money to make it down to Disney World and the time and all the rest?

So you're not quick just to commit yourself. You're giving your word. Do you see a slowness in society to make commitments?

[5 : 54] To make promises? Don't we love non-committal? In churches, no membership, no expectations of members. It's just come and go. In marriages, businesses, even contracts.

We don't like commitment. We like to be free. We like to not have any strands holding us down. Just to be able to come and go as we want in every scene of life.

And so when we're called to make a promise, ooh, that's a different matter. Because to promise is to place yourself in a position of obligation to another.

Where you are actually now obliged to do something. You actually now owe it to someone. That's a humble position to take, isn't it?

You say, yes, we will go to Disney World. You owe it to your daughter. It is your duty. It is your moral obligation. And it's a humbling of yourself.

[7 : 00] You now have a debt to pay, a commitment to keep, an obligation to fulfill. And if you don't believe it, just try breaking your promise to your daughter. But you promised, Daddy.

Well, a promise. Consider the nature of God's promises in the same way. Can you put God under obligation to you?

Can you put him in your debt? Can you do anything that will make him owe you one? We try to do that with each other, don't we? We do a good deed and we expect a good deed in return.

Can you do that with God? Can you do anything to make God owe you something? Listen to Romans 11.35. Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?

Who has ever given to God anything? Whether it's his money, his service, his time, his talent, that God should then be obligated to repay him?

[8 : 07] And the answer is no one. You can't put God in your debt. We cannot do anything to put God in our debt. Oh, but he has and he does put himself in our debt.

Every time he promises to do something for us. Every time you read in your Bible, I will. The I wills of Christ.

He becomes your debtor. Not by outside force, but by his own initiative. When he uttered those words, I will.

I promise. Now, that's an amazing stoop, isn't it? We speak of the stoop and the humility to put yourself under your little five-year-old daughter to where you owe her now.

What is it for the creator to put himself under obligation to his creature? Amazing condescension.

[9 : 22] Pure grace. Every promise just drips with undeserved favor that he would ever enter into such a commitment with us.

Now, can you see why I say that if we understand the nature of a promise, we'll treasure it for the precious thing it is. Now, answer me on this.

Why would he do that? Why would God put himself under obligation to us with a promise? Your thoughts? Strengthen our faith.

To strengthen our faith. How would it do that, Mark? We know that he will never break his word. Okay. To strengthen our faith since we know something of his nature.

To give us hope. What does the little girl want from her daddy?

[10 : 28] Do you promise? What's she wanting? Security? Assurance? Assurance. She's wanting assurance, isn't she?

Confidence. She wants to know for sure that they're going to be with Mickey Mouse. And she's wanting to know that for sure. And so she says, do you promise?

She wants a commitment so that she can know for sure. And once she knows, then she can go to sleep. She can dream about Disney World and being there.

She's comforted. She's encouraged. She can begin planning for it, looking forward with hope. And even already enjoying it in anticipation.

And that's precisely one of the reasons God stoops to give us a promise. Every time he says, I will, he is seeking to assure us of something.

[11 : 27] To take all the doubt out of the matter whatsoever. To give us hope, expectation, and comfort. He's seeking to put our hearts at ease on this matter.

Because he has promised to do it. So his promise can be likened to signing on the bottom line of a contract. You enter into a business contract.

Maybe you're having a builder build you a home. And by signing his name on the bottom line, he is promising to do all that is stipulated in the contract.

That putting his name down, that promise obligates him to you. He owes this to you now because he has entered into that contract.

Or you take out a loan on your house and you sign a contract with a bank. And when you put your name on the bottom line, you are promising to pay the full amount at the interest stated.

[12 : 29] You now stand behind that promise. And so that's a picture of what God does with us every time he makes a promise to us. He's putting his name down. He's guaranteeing on the merits of his name, who he is, that this is going to happen.

His very character, his truth and faithfulness is now on the line. So what would God have to do to fail in one of his promises? We'd have to deny himself.

Or as one man put it, he'd have to un-God himself. He'd have to become something that he is not. Unfaithful. He is faithful.

And so he would have to totally un-God himself to default on just one of his I wills.

So do you see how the nature of a promise then makes them very precious to us if we understand that it is the infinite, eternal God obligating himself to his creatures every time he gives them a promise.

[13 : 41] Any questions, comments as we just pause on this point on the nature of a promise? What God is doing? Yes, Dale and then Roger.

When you contrast man's promises and God, God is far more serious than man's. Man's weak and man is fallible. Because of who God is, it's solid.

Yeah, when we think of his name, and we'll spend some time on that. What is it about his name that makes the promise so sure? But you're absolutely right. It's who it is that makes the promise.

It puts it in a whole different league of assurance, doesn't it, from any man. Dale? I see a caution here on our part in this, in that God is bowing down in a sense, or coming down and humbling himself in a sense, to fulfill this promise that we don't become arrogant.

He is still superior. And lofty in our thoughts, in demanding. He is still superior. He is still above us all.

[14 : 54] Yet he is making these promises, and he must maintain his Godship. Yes, it's not a reason for pride. It's rather a reason for humility, isn't it?

Does the incarnation make you proud to think that this eternal God humbled himself and condescended to become a man in order to go as a servant to the death of the cross?

Does that condescending and putting himself down to serve our interests, does that make you proud, Dale? Or does it not rather just strip all the pride out of you to stand in the face of such humility and say, he did that for me?

And it's in the same sense that there is absolutely no pride, should be no sense of boasting and high-mindedness to think, well, God's beneath me now. He owes me.

It's he himself who is stooped to put himself under obligation to us. That's amazing. It's shocking. And that's the thing as I studied the promises.

[16 : 00] If that's what a promise is, John, you better start finding out what these promises are in the word. You better start receiving them as such, as God himself obligating himself to do these things.

Well, that puts a whole different slant on it, but it's a humbling thing, isn't it, to think that God would stoop that low in serving us and our good.

I think of the grievous harm that has been done by false preachers who promise health, wealth, and wisdom in God's name, and people who've been deceived by that and turned away from them.

So we need to be sure that what we're saying God promised, he really did promise, and he promised it to us. We're going to look at some of the different kinds of promises. Some are conditional, and they're only yours if you meet the conditions.

Some are unconditional. We'll look at that. And so we need to be very careful that we're not grabbing hold of some promise and twisting it and making it ours when it's not what God has promised at all, and especially, as Dare says, if we're preachers and we're holding out to people, that God promises you in this life, right here and now, health, wealth, and prosperity, and it's just your faith that will make the difference then.

[17 : 24] That's a lie, and it has caused great havoc. Well, let me go on then. Unless there are any other questions, comments? Jackie?

You asked why God would obligate himself, and it says in the first year, the first year he read to us, that through them we may participate in the divine nature.

I don't get that. Okay, we're going to return to that, both that and the other, the fruits of the promises, the consequences of the promises, and we'll see that in further studies.

One of the reasons the promises are precious are because of what they promise and the things they have to do with. They have to do with us, sinful mortals, actually bearing the likeness of the divine, that his divine nature is planted in us, that we're born again, not of corruptible.

We take on the nature of Christ. So in that sense, we share the nature of God when we're born again. We're not gods, but we are made in his image.

[18 : 32] It's renewed. The moral image of God is renewed in us. So we'll look at what it means that we would have that benefit and also the benefit of escaping the corruption that's in the world.

Is that a small benefit? I want to know these promises, if it's going to help me to escape the corruption in the world, because that's where I live, and it has a pull on my heart.

So we'll see how the promises are precious because of what they, the matters, the great matters that they tend to. Anything else before we go on? Yeah, Bill?

Yeah. God is able to fulfill all his promises because he's able to make it happen. I can only make it happen whatever he allows me to make happen.

We read it. Yeah. Huge difference, isn't it? He's sovereign. We aren't. Well, you guys are getting ahead of me. That's next week. A.W. Pink helps us to appreciate the value of the promises as we look at their role.

[19 : 35] What is the role of a promise? And he wants us to see the promises in connection with God's plans and the fulfilling of God's plans.

How do the promises of God fit into this whole thing of God's plans and fulfillment of his plans to bless his people? Now, we're going to see some promises are to withhold blessing from some people, and even to curse people and to destroy and root up and tear down.

All God's words that he promises, whether good or bad. But I'm thinking now more in terms of the promises to the believer. And I'm asking this. How do the promises of God to do good to his people fit into his whole plan of doing them good?

Let's walk through it. Pink gives us three chronological steps in the timeline of God doing good to his people. So God's going to do you good.

Where does all that begin? What's the first step for God doing good to you? Where does it start? Salvation even before salvation.

[20 : 43] I mean, we'd have to go out that door to get back far enough. Where does God's plan to do, or where does God's doing us good begin? Before the foundation of the world.

What happened then? He chose us. He loved us. But how did love express itself? What did he do before the foundation of the world?

He chose us, yes. He decreed. He predestined. He planned, didn't he?

To choose, to predestine. He's laying plans. Who he's going to save, isn't he? He's laying plans for all the good he's going to bring to his people.

And so any good that comes to his people had its first step way back before the creation of the world. Ephesians 1.4. Turn to Ephesians 1.11.

[21 : 44] So the first step is God's plan. God's purposes to bless his people. His eternal decrees. Ephesians 1.11.

Chapter 3 of our 1689 Confession of Faith begins the chapter on the divine decrees this way. From all eternity, God decreed all that should happen in time.

Okay? That's a summary of what the Bible teaches. That from all eternity, God decreed, he determined everything that's to happen in time.

Here's one verse that supports such a statement. Ephesians 1.11. In him, that is in Christ, we were also chosen, having been predestined.

There's that word I heard. Predestined according to what? To the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

[22 : 48] So God has a plan. God has a purpose. The new song we began singing on Sunday night two weeks ago. God never works without purpose or plan. He has a plan. Why should we think that to be strange?

You plan before you go to work. You plan before you build a house. God has a plan for everything that he is going to do in his universe in space-time history.

And he works everything out in conformity with that plan, with that purpose. So there's first the plan to do his people good. Long before the performance of the plan.

So God's purpose. His plan. When God does good to his people, it's no spur-of-the-moment thing.

It's rather something that was planned from eternity past. Well, there's many other verses that we could cite. Jeremiah 29.11. God says to his people, I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord.

[23 : 56] Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future. Now, some people will say there's the proof text for health, wealth, and prosperity. No, we don't have time to get into that.

I just cite it to say God has plans for his people. I have plans for you. Psalm 139.16. David can say, All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

My day today was planned before one of my days began. From eternity, God decreed everything that will happen in time. So that's the first step of God doing good to his people.

He planned it in eternity past. Let's skip the second step and jump to the third step. The performance of the plan. Okay? Here's the performance.

He's actually carrying out of that purpose to bless his people. Because again, look at Ephesians 1.11. It says that he works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

[25 : 00] So it's like the builder. And he's got the blueprint, the plan in front of him. And he looks at that plan. And then he goes out on the actual job site. And he does there what is on the blueprint.

Well, God does that perfectly. He works out everything in real space-time life in accordance with the plan. The blueprint. That's God's performance of his plan.

So you have the plan in eternity past. And then you have the performance of the plan in the lifetime of his people. In your lifetime.

You've had some of those ancient plans of God worked out in your lifetime. Every day they're being worked out, you see. The performance, the accomplishing, the fulfilling of his plan.

So God had a plan, didn't he, to send his son. It wasn't any spur-of-the-moment thing. He had planned it from eternity. To send his son to save his people from their sins. And then, Galatians 4.4 says, In the fullness of time, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law.

[26 : 09] He had a plan. And then a plan to send him. Then he sent him and fulfilled the plan. So whatever the Lord plans, he performs.

Psalms 33, 10 and 11. The Lord foils the plans of the nations. He thwarts the purposes of the people. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever.

The purposes of his heart through all generations. Job, I know that you can do all things. No plan of yours can be thwarted.

So all that he planned is fulfilled and accomplished, performed. So his plans to bless his people, phase one.

The performance of his plan to bless his people, phase three. Now, what is phase two, do you suppose? Winslow's. Hint. This series is on what?

[27 : 13] The promises. Okay. So phase two, coming between the plan and the performance of the plan, is the promise of God. The promise to his people that he will do them good.

Before it happens, he promises them. So that Winslow can say, I read God's heart in his promises. I read his secrets, his secret plans.

I read his mind and what he planned from all eternity in his promises. When he promises to do something for me, I say, oh, that's what he planned from all eternity.

So his promise is the revealing of what he had planned to do. Now, question, are all God's plans revealed by a promise?

No. Why not? Give me an example or explain it. There are secret things that belong only to the Lord. Okay.

[28 : 21] Deuteronomy 29, 29. The secret things belong to the Lord our God. There are some plans that he keeps secret. He keeps hidden. Others that he reveals.

And when he reveals them, they are promises. He reveals them to his people in promises. But, right, not all of his plans are revealed by a promise.

But his promises are the revelation of some of his plans that he has for us. So those are the three steps in God doing good to his people.

He plans it in eternity past. And some of those plans he announces to his people. He reveals his plans in promise. And then, in its right time, he performs the promise stage three.

Now, why this middle step then? You see, this is the question. What is the role of the promise? Why is there a middle step between his plan and his performance? Why does he bother with his people and telling them and promising things to them?

[29 : 31] Why the promise? Can you see its role? Why is it there? Something to do with faith. Hmm.

Good. We'll see the role of faith in a promise. It's calling forth. Faith isn't. When we see God's promises fulfilled in our life, it keeps strengthening our faith.

Okay. So when he makes a promise, and when we see it performed, it strengthens our faith to go on believing other promises that have not yet been performed. So it strengthens faith.

Good. Anything else? I'm sorry. It brings glory to himself. In what way, Jeff? When he fulfills that promise and comes through and delivers, it only magnifies himself.

Did you hear that? When he comes through and delivers on his promise, it only magnifies himself. So there's another reason for the middle step of promise, to bring glory to him.

[30 : 36] Steve? It also brings glory to him as his people are trusting in him joyfully, and the world sees that. Good. So between the promise and the performance, to have a person believing glorifies God, to see them trusting him, that I really take him at his word.

He said it. I expect it. It glorifies the truthfulness of God, doesn't it? All right. So God has his reason. One of the reasons, again, is to encourage us, to comfort us, to give us hope.

One of the authors says, while love is hidden, we cannot be comforted by it. Isn't that true? While love is hidden, we cannot be comforted by it.

And so God's not content to leave his loving plans for us concealed between the planning stage and the fulfillment stage. And so he graciously makes them known to us in promise that we might be comforted by his love.

We might rest in his love and, as Pink says, stretch ourselves comfortably upon his sure promises. We'll return to that idea.

[31 : 51] But doesn't that make the promise precious to know that God gives it, that we might know his love, know his plans for us? He could have surprised us with all of his good gifts without ever announcing them in advance to us.

Think of living in a world without promises. Now, he had the plan to do you all these goods, same goods, but he never promised anything. He just performed them. And so it's like popcorn in your life.

It's just all of a sudden there's a blessing, a blessing, and no promise to prepare you for it, to make you look forward to it. How much poorer would our lives be without a promise? Think, perhaps one of the most precious promises to a Christian is Romans 8.28, isn't it?

That we know in all things God is working for the good of those who, he's working it together for our good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

Now, just imagine a universe without Romans 8.28 and without any promise of that, okay? It's still true. God has planned to do good in everything to his people.

[32 : 56] And so in your life, he's working and he's bringing about more Christ-likeness in your life through all of your troubles and trials. And he's bringing about good in it.

But he never told you. Well, you would be robbed of the comfort of that promise. How much poorer this world would be without that one promise.

Romans 8.28, how much comfort would be lost. Think if God planned to raise us from the dead and give us eternal life and a new heaven and new earth, but never told us about it by way of promise.

Just, we got to the end of our lives. We died and, wow, there's eternal life. And, wow, I'm accepted before God because of Jesus' righteousness.

And, wow, this is a new heaven and a new earth. And I'm perfect and you're perfect. And, wow, these surprises. But didn't breathe a word of it by way of promise. And so we spent our four score and ten or whatever we were given in this life without that to buoy us up, to courage, to give us hope.

[34 : 09] Can you see something of the role of the promise between the plan and the performance to encourage us, to help us? Does it not make the promises precious? The believer always has something good to look forward to.

Adoniram Judson from a rat-infested prison in Burma could say, My future is as bright as the promises of God. What do you do without promises when you're in a rat-infested prison?

I suppose you're more easily tempted to lose hope and to give up. No, but God gives us promises to brighten our hope.

Man can endure a lot if he has hope. So, yes, we see all these benefits of the promise, of the middle step of promise. But in other ways, the promise creates difficulties, doesn't it?

What do I mean by it? What do I mean by that? That the promise, this middle step, creates certain difficulties that we now have that we wouldn't have if he hadn't given us promises.

[35 : 17] Roger? The promises are part of the whole intimate relationship we have with God. And it's built on trust, built on repeated, you see God continually blessing, continuing covering for it, continuing protecting you.

And you build up a whole catalog of faithfulness on his part, then that relationship deepens. All right, I'm talking about the reasons we might be tempted to say, Lord, thank you for your promises, but no thanks.

I would like just for you to make your plans for eternity and then just surprise me with the performance. Because I find that having a promise makes life difficult. I'm asking, in what way does the promise make life difficult?

You shared another blessing in how it fosters our relationship with God. What are some of the hard things of, oh, I've got this promise. This is causing problems in my, this is causing some tension.

Not God's fault, but my fault. But it's nevertheless an opportunity for temptation for me. What am I tempted to now that I have a promise? Maybe not believe, but like the one of us sowing and reaping, I don't see myself reaping what I sow.

[36 : 36] Okay. So we have the promise. And we don't see the fulfillment. And what happens when you have a promise and you don't see the fulfillment? And you see all these obstacles in the way to fulfillment?

You can start doubting the promise. And what is that doubting? Who is that doubting? You see, we are now doubting the veracity of God.

We are now doubting the ability of God, the willingness of God to keep His word. And so the promise puts us in a situation where we can be tempted to unbelief.

We can be tempted to lean on our own understanding, to lean on our own strength and try to help God out a little bit. Darren? Well, a promise with hell for a season for God to cause us to grow and to trust Him more can really discourage you.

And I'm thinking of when Sarah, we were told there were five, nine chances out of ten she wouldn't live to be six when she was born. And people came to us meaning well, but not biblical, that if we only believed she would be healed and, you know, right now.

[37 : 45] And, you know, that is an assault on your faith and your testimony. And it's just, you know, Satan can't really try to get at me and tear you down because we know God was sovereign in control and was going to do His good for her.

But it was being assaulted and that withdrawing of it, you know, tries your faith. There's the word, the trial of your faith. Is not the receiving of a promise the trial of your faith then?

So as wonderful as promises are, they immediately put us in a trial. Am I going to believe God or not? Am I going to start leaning on my own?

How did the promise that God would make a great nation out of Abraham become a trial to his faith? He was impatient.

What did it tempt him to do? Okay, so Sarah says, well, let's think about this, Abraham. Maybe the way God's going to fulfill His promise is for you to take my handmaid Hagar as a wife and for you to bring up descendants through her.

[38 : 59] Now, that's a violation of many things, but it violates Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. Sarah's leaning on her own understanding and Abraham's leaning with her.

And you know the problems that came about through that. But because of a promise, I've got this promise. How are we going to get it fulfilled? And so there are challenges to the fact that we have promises.

But say, is the trial of our faith the worst thing? Or is it not one of those precious things? Yeah, that's right.

Peter told us that that's more precious than gold that perishes. So receiving the promise. The promises are precious for many, many reasons. And one of the reasons is because it tries our faith.

It puts us in the crucible. Will we trust Him? And it's in that crucible that we learn, as Roger said, the faithfulness of God. Yes, look, He did it again. And we seem to be so surprised each time He does it again and does it again.

[40 : 09] But He's teaching us in experience His faithfulness. Not just from His Word. And we're not belittling His Word. But He is teaching us in life that He is to be trusted.

So the promises of God, they come between the plan from eternity and the fulfillment in your lifetime. And they stand as the revelation of God's heart.

He's unfolding His heart to you, child of God. He's saying, now this is one of the things that I've planned for you. And here's another. So you can start expecting these things. No, don't say, but if I expect and it doesn't happen, then I'm...

No. If He's promised it, you are to start expecting it. And to doubt it is to doubt Him. So He's preparing us for the performance so that when it happens, He will be glorified.

But Jeff hit it on the nail on the head. So there are purposes for us in the promises. To encourage our faith. To try our faith.

[41 : 14] To strengthen our faith. To develop perseverance in the faith. And character and Christ-likeness. But there is the greatest promise. And that is that it brings glory to God.

To announce it beforehand. And we'll look at that next week. It's more glorifying for God to announce to people what He's going to do before He does it.

So that when He does it, they see, oh, He did that. He told me He was going to. If He had just planned it and then performed it, we might say, oh, lucky me.

What a neat chance that was that it happened to me. But the announcing of it, the revealing of it by way of promise, secures the glory for God.

Well, our time's up. Find some promises this week. And remember that God stands with His name on the bottom line behind those promises to you.

[42 : 16] We're dismissed. We're dismissed.