

Precious Promises (part 7)

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[0:00] I think this is the last session on precious things of God. We've looked at many precious things and we're finishing on the precious promises. We've come to that application of how to make use of the promises of God.

Precious things haven't been given to us just to stash away in a safe and forget about. But these are precious things that we are meant to live upon and to make use of. And so we're looking at how to make use of the promises.

What do we need to do first? Know them, find them. Find a promise that matches my need. Then what do I do once I've found it in the Bible? M&M.;

Memorize and? And meditate upon it. Again, even if I've already identified this is my problem and this is the promise to match it. Or whether I've just found a promise and I'm laying up medicine for future ailments and needs.

Memorize and meditate upon it. Seeing what does this promise say to me in my situation. And then thirdly, we saw it last time. Pray the promise.

[1:11] Just as you endorse a check or you used to endorse a check and take it to the bank and call for a payment of it. So with the promise, you take the promise, you put your name on it, you claim it, you come back to the promiser and you say, Lord, do as you said.

You promised this. Now do what you have promised. And then we come this morning to the last two things. We're going to spend most of our time in the fourth matter.

Anybody know what the last two are? Want to take a stab at what do we do once we pray the promise? What remains to be done with a promise? Watch for it. That's the fourth.

Believe it. That's included in watching for it. Okay, so we're watching and waiting for it. And then when it comes, then what else do we have to do with the promise? Thank him for the promise.

Okay, so these are our last two points. Number four, to wait patiently and expectantly for the promise to be fulfilled. And then to give thanks for the promise fulfilled.

[2:16] So wait patiently and expectantly for the promise to be fulfilled. Spurgeon. So we have endorsed the check. We've believably presented the promise to the Lord as a man presents a check at the counter of the bank.

We must plead it by prayer, expecting to have it fulfilled. If he has come to heaven's bank at the right date, he will receive the promised amount at once.

If the date should happen to be further on, he must patiently wait till its arrival. But meanwhile, he may count the promise as money, for the bank is sure to pay when the due time arrives.

So I suppose he's comparing it to a post-dated check. And some of God's promises have dates that are not immediate, but we have to wait on them.

And so he's saying we need to wait patiently, but believably and expectantly, the date and the time of the promise. Sometimes saints are made to wait a long time for the fulfillment of God's promise.

[3:24] Can you give me some examples? Who in the Bible had to wait a long time for a promise to be fulfilled? Abraham. What promise was he waiting for? A child.

He had to wait some 25 years for that promised son. What else was Abraham waiting for? Land. He had to wait over 400 years.

And he obviously died and never received what was promised, but his offspring would. All right? He had to wait for many, many blessings, especially that blessing of one of his offspring that would bring blessing to all the nations.

He died before he saw that as well. So he had to wait a long time for his promises to fulfill. Who else had to wait a long time? Noah. Noah.

What was he waiting for? Waiting for rain and not an inch or two, but a flood. So it appears he waited 120 years while the ark was a building.

[4:28] Is that what they teach down there at the ark museum? Dale in Maryland just got back. Yeah. Okay. So 120 days or years of waiting.

That's a long time to wait. It's about a fourth of Noah's life. Who else had to wait? Jacob.

Jacob. What did he wait on, Paul? For a wife. For a wife. All right. Jacob had to wait. How long did he wait? Seven years.

And then he had to work another fort or seven to get the one he thought he was getting. All right.

Who else had to wait? Dennis. Simeon was waiting for the consolation.

Yeah. One of the writers, I think it might have been Pink, said, yeah, he had been promised that he would see the Lord's Christ. And he had to wait until he had one foot in the grave to see the promise fulfilled.

[5:29] Well, you may have to wait until one foot is in the grave to see some of your promises fulfilled. You might have to wait until both feet are in the grave, as we'll see.

Who else had to wait long? Hannah. She was promised a child. Okay. David. What was David waiting on? All right.

Remember, he was anointed as just a young boy. That was the essence of a promise. The prophet was saying, you are God's anointed. You are the chosen king of Jehovah. But he didn't ascend to the throne for another 10 to 12 years.

And you remember how trying those years were as he was chased by Saul, hunted for his life. 12 years is a long wait. Kathy.

How long did they have to wait? Well, we go back to creation. Even Genesis 3.15.

[6:32] There's coming a seed of the woman who crushed the serpent's head. And then that promise restored on and on. And then through Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. And so 2,500 years.

Long wait for the promised Messiah. Yeah. Roger? The New Testament church waiting for the Lord's return. All right. How long have they been waiting?

How long is it? Yeah. Somewhere around 2,000 years. Again, the church has been waiting. He said he's coming again. Where is this coming, he promised?

We don't see it. So we're made to wait long for it. How about the Jews down in Babylon? They were told 70 years. They had to wait 70 years for the release.

Well, so if you are finding that the expiration date on your promise is still future and it's post-dated and you're being made to wait, realize that you're not being treated somewhat differently from the rest of God's people.

[7:47] Indeed, some of his most chosen servants had to wait the longest. Because faith was built among many things by that long wait.

Now, turn to Hebrews 11. There we have this hall of fame of faith. And at the end of that chapter, we have this interesting statement made about all these people.

And we've named some of them. But far more were named. And then, here's the statement. At the end of the chapter, verse 39 and 40.

These were all commended for their faith. Yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Perfect. So, these people, some of them received some of the promises. Noah, yes, lived long enough to see the promised flood and so on. But none of them received the ultimate promise, which was a new heavens, a new earth, full and final, complete redemption, where we are perfected in body and soul and we live in a perfect world.

[9:13] That was the essence of the great promise of the gospel. What it had promised, the great thing of living in the presence of God without sin forever. That had not yet been fulfilled.

And he says none of them had received the thing promised because God had planned something better. Isn't that what he says? Something better.

Isn't that interesting? God only makes us wait when it means getting something better if we wait.

And the better is that together, all of us together, should be made perfect at the coming of Christ.

Well, Pink says, Many of the best of God's promises to his people will not receive their richest accomplishment until we are in glory. Again, Pink, there's often a long and hard winter between the sowing time of prayer, praying the promise, and the reaping of the answer.

Even the Lord Jesus himself has not yet received a full answer to the prayer he made in John 17, 2,000 years ago. He's still waiting for the promised answer.

[10 : 30] Father, Father, you said that you would give me a people, and I want those you have given me to be with me where I am so that they may see his glory.

As long as there's any people on the earth that are not with him, seeing him as he is, that promise to Jesus has not yet been fulfilled. He is waiting for the promise.

So, delays are to be expected, what appear to be delays on our part. They sorely try the faith of the child of God.

Look at Psalm 77. What happens? We want to just think a bit about what happens when the promise is delayed. This is not an easy thing for us.

We don't find waiting easy, and we need to be aware of some of its dangers and the reality, being honest about unfulfilled promises.

[11 : 35] Here is Psalm of Asaph, whether talking about a personal problem of his own or whether as leading the congregation of Israel, he's speaking of the problem of unfulfilled promises for all the people of God.

He says in verse 8, well, verse 7, Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever?

Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful and so on? Has his promise failed for all time?

When we're made to wait long, we can feel like his promise has failed. And Asaph understands that he can come to the Lord and just tell the Lord how he feels.

I feel like the promise. Has it failed? You see, just in verbalizing those words before the Lord should jerk Asaph back into reality, shouldn't it?

[12 : 37] Has his unfailing love vanished forever? How can unfailing love vanish, you see? And just voicing his complaint to the Lord.

Has his promise failed for all time? I believe that pouring out our hearts to the Lord and telling him how we feel is part of the answer. As we see how futile and meaningless our question is.

Of course not. Unfailing love can't fail. And neither can his promise fail. But that's how we feel. So tell the Lord. Psalm 119 and verse 82.

The psalmist here says, My eyes fail looking for your promise. I say, when will you comfort me? You promised to comfort me.

And I'm looking for it. When will you comfort me? My eyes fail. I'm looking, Lord. And I'm looking so hard and so long that my eyes are starting to fail.

[13 : 37] I'm starting to find it hard to expect the promise. Again, verse 123 of the same psalm. My eyes fail looking for your salvation.

Looking for your promise deliverance. Looking for your righteous promise, he says. My eyes fail looking for your righteous promise. So this is being honest with God.

Like that father in the Gospels who was made a promise by Jesus. He says, Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. And standing before your promise that's so slow and being fulfilled from my perspective, I find that unbelief is strong.

So waiting for a promise requires both patience and hope. Look at Hebrews chapter 6. Again, Abraham is the example to us here of a patient waiter.

Being made to wait patiently for the promise. Hebrews 6.12.

[14 : 48] We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. And then it goes right into Abraham, the man of faith.

Notice two things. Patience and faith and patience. God made promises to Abraham.

He goes on to say, And since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, I will surely bless you and give you many descendants. Verse 15. And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

Hebrews 10.35 and 36. So do not throw away your confidence. It will be richly rewarded.

You need to persevere. You need patience. So that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay and so on.

[16 : 00] So we see the need for both patience and for hope. Hope is that confidence. Don't throw away your confidence. That's being confident that what God promised he is going to give.

That's hope. The confident expectation of future good. And so we have patience and hope that's needed for promises. And of the two, I think patience is easier than hope.

Now, patience is no easy virtue, is it? We confess often we have need of patience. And yet I find that's easier than hope.

Because hope is to maintain that razor-edge expectation that I know the promise is coming. It may be around the corner or a dozen corners, but it's coming.

And I'm looking for it. That's hope. And I find that harder than just waiting patiently for the promise. Neither one are easy.

[17:04] They both take the power of the Spirit in us. But with every passing monthly period for Sarah, hope became harder. Hope became more difficult.

With the passing of every birthday, it became harder for Abraham and Sarah to maintain that confident expectation of a son. A promised son.

And so I believe it's true that every time we pray the promise and do not see the fulfillment, hope becomes harder the next time we pray. Have you found that?

So, yes, you're excited to take the promises and to pray them back to God. And you go and you pray it to God. And there's no fulfillment of the promise.

It becomes a little harder to come with the same expectation of God's going to do what he said the next time you pray. And yet that's exactly what we need to do to wait patiently and expectantly, that is, with hope for the fulfilling of the promise.

[18:12] So when we get up from pleading the promise, we need to be on the lookout for God's answer. God's fulfillment to his promise. And that's no small part of what it means to wait on the Lord.

To wait on the Lord is to be looking for him to do what he said. Let me give you an example of confident expectation of looking for the answer once we've prayed for the promises fulfillment. It's Elijah in 1 Kings 18. And he's been promised rain. Now, that's not like the weatherman says we're expecting rain on Wednesday.

It had been three and a half years since they'd seen rain. They were under the judgment of God as a nation. No rain. And so this was a rare promise, a special promise.

God has said there's going to be rain. And it required much faith on Elijah's part. And so, with the promise of God in hand, Elijah climbs up to the top of Mount Carmel.

[19:18] After slaying all the prophets of Baal and that encounter on Mount Carmel, he goes up to the top of the mountain. And he's down on his face before the Lord, praying for promised rain.

And he says to his servant, go and look toward the sea. Now, in Israel, when rain approached, it came from the west across the Mediterranean and would bring the showers.

Gather up the waters of the sea and bring them across the land. Go and look toward the sea. That's faith waiting, you see. He's prayed the promise. And down on his face before God, he is now looking for the answer.

Go and look toward the sea. And he goes up higher on the mountain where he can see across the Mediterranean. And he sees nothing. And he comes back and he reports nothing to Elijah.

And Elijah's praying the promise. Go look again. Six times. Nothing. But he's still looking. That's the lesson in expectant waiting.

[20:22] It became harder in one sense, wouldn't it, if you were Elijah? Every time that the answer came back, nothing. To pray again. And to send the watchman to look for the rain cloud again.

But as I thought of this this morning, there's another sense in which, if we're thinking right, every time we pray and don't see the answer, we should really get more excited.

Because we're closer to the answer, aren't we? I mean, that's the side of faith. That if God has promised to do something for me, and I come and I pray it, and it doesn't happen.

Rather than losing hope, the next time I come and pray, Lord, I know we're closer now to the fulfillment. Do what you said. And I'm going to be looking all the sharper and more expectantly.

Because you said. And you don't lie. You can't lie. You would ungod yourself to not fulfill your promise to me. So, we see this wonderful example of looking, looking, looking, praying the promise.

[21:33] Looking for the answer. And finally, the seventh time. Yes, there's a cloud the size of a man's hand, rising from the sea. Go tell King Ahab, hitch up the chariot and go down before the rain stops you.

You see, it's good as done. It's raining in Elijah's mind. And Elijah tells the king, you better get down from the mountain or the rain will stop you. So certainly is of God's answer.

Well, that's the posture of waiting. When we talk about waiting for the Lord, we don't mean some passive, just sitting there on your hands and thinking nothing.

But we mean expectant watching, looking for the answer to come. That's hope. Now, we have plenty of examples of the opposite. Of the lack of expectation.

The lack of hope waiting for the promise to be fulfilled. And we see most of these given to us in the scriptures from the Israelites, don't we? And their failure to believe the promise and to expect it.

[22 : 36] In Psalm 106, we have that account of Israel at the Red Sea. And so, God has promised to bring them out of bondage and to free them from Egypt.

To take them into the promised land. And now, they've got the Red Sea in front of them. And they've got the chariots of Pharaoh kicking up the dust across the plain coming to hem them in.

There they are. They're duck soup. And yet, they're a people of the promise. They have a promise from God that is as sure as anything else. And so, what should they do at the Red Sea?

They should pray the promise. Lord, you said you would take us out and bring us in. It doesn't look like things are promising here, Lord. But what are you going to do? I don't know, but I'm excited.

You're going to do something. Because you said you'd take us out and bring us in. What did they do at the Red Sea? They rebelled at the Red Sea. Verse 7 of 106.

[23 : 43] When our fathers were in Egypt, they gave no thought to your miracles. They did not remember your many kindnesses. And they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea. Yet, he saved them for his name's sake.

After all, his name was on the line. He had promised. And so, for his name's sake, he saved them.

To uphold his reputation of faithfulness and truthfulness. He saved them for his name's sake.

To make his power known as well as his faithfulness. He rebuked the Red Sea and it dried up. He led them through the depths, through a desert. He saved them from the hand of the foe, from the hand of the enemy.

He redeemed them. The waters covered their adversaries. Not one of them survived. Then, they believed the promises. And sang his praise.

Now, this is on the far side of the Red Sea. This is after they've walked through on dry ground. And after the waters had covered all their enemies. What's wrong with this picture?

[24 : 42] What's wrong with the then they believed his promises? What kind of faith waits to see before believing? It's not faith being confident of what we do not see.

It's the kind of faith that Thomas has when he says, Unless I put my fingers in his hands, I won't believe it's him. And when Jesus comes and says, Put your fingers in, Thomas.

He gives him that rebuke that, Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. So, we ought to be honoring the Lord by believing his promise.

And expecting his promise on the near side of the Red Sea. When we're hemmed in. And when the promise and the circumstances seem to be at loggerheads. And the circumstances seem to mock the promise.

God said he'd bring us out and bring us into the land. But this seems to make fun of God's promise. That's when we need to believe. Then we should believe the promise.

[25 : 49] Then we should look for God to answer in his own way. So, when circumstances and the promise of God seem to be incompatible. Which one should you believe?

Well, God. Because circumstances can be foolers. Especially when you're dealing with a God with whom all things are possible. And not everything is always as it seems.

So, we should respond at the Red Seas that we're facing. And the oncoming chariots. I don't know when or how you're going to answer, Lord. But I'm sure getting excited to see how you're going to get me out of this one.

How you're going to be faithful to do what you said you would do. How you're going to pull this off. It should excite our faith. It should excite our expectation. In John Bunyan's autobiography, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners.

He names seven abominations that he finds in his heart. And number five is this. To forget to watch for that for which I prayed.

[26:54] To forget to watch for that for which I prayed. Now, why would Bunyan call that an abomination?

A stench in God's nostrils. What's the big deal? If I came to you with a request.

And you promised to fulfill it. And I walk away without the least expectation of you doing what you said. What am I saying about you?

So you said, I'll meet you for breakfast at the downtown or tomorrow morning at eight. And I do not expect you to be there at all. I don't go there.

I don't look to meet you there. I just, well, that's Joe. He's always prompt. I'm not picking on you, Joe. I'm talking, that's Ebenezer.

[27:52] There's no Ebenezer here. That's Ebenezer. What am I saying about him? I'm saying either he can't be trusted. He's not able to get there. It's dissing him, isn't it?

And no wonder Bunyan says, what an abomination that the Almighty God should put his name on the line and say, I will do this. And if I am not expecting to see the answer to my prayer for him to do what he promised, that's an abomination.

And it's an abomination we all are guilty of far too much. We're not expecting to see the promise fulfilled. It's to trifle with God as if it makes no difference whether I pray or don't pray the promises.

No. We have a higher expectation of fallen men, don't we? When they tell us they'll meet us at 8, we'll at least go there expecting them to be there and maybe be surprised when they're not.

And Bunyan says many times, I'm not even looking to see God's answer to what I've asked for. And so we have these verses in the Psalms. Psalm 5 and verse 3. David says, In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice.

[29:04] In the morning, I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation. Isn't that a beautiful picture? I think it was, I can't remember the man's name.

Mueller of London, of the orphanages, said, I want to come before the Lord early in each day and lay before him my cares so that I can spend the whole of my day in joy.

And David is saying the same. Early in the morning, Lord, you hear my prayer. I lay my requests before you and then wait in expectation.

The rest of my day is waiting in expectation for what I've asked from you. Psalm 119, 147. I rise before dawn and cry for help.

I have put my hope in your word. That is putting his hope in his promise. Confident expectation that he will do what he said.

[30:01] Psalm 33, 20. We wait in hope for the Lord, for he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.

Remember hope? Confident expectation of what you've promised. You've promised to be my help, an ever-present help in trouble. So I'm going to put my hope, my expectation.

I'm looking for that promised help. Now, what are some of the temptations then when we're made to wait for a promise?

We've seen our need for hope and patience. What are some of the temptations that come upon us when we're made to wait long for a promise?

I'm not good enough. God's not going to answer my prayer because I'm displeased. So we're looking for a reason why God won't answer us.

[31:02] And as if our goodness had anything to do with God keeping his promise in the first place. They're all yes and amen in Christ, not in me. Now, granted, there might be a conditional element to the promise that we do need to examine ourselves.

And in that case, that's true. But if we go there and just kind of make an excuse, well, probably won't happen because I'm so bad. Well, we're doubting. Karen?

Doubt is that God is not good and he is seeing himself. Okay. So we can start thinking ill thoughts of God, can't we, when we have to wait long.

We can put things on God rather than putting the best construction on him. We can put the worst construction on the situation and say, well, he just doesn't love us. Okay. Okay.

Hmm. And have you ever been helpers of God in fulfilling promises? Like Sarah? Well, I guess, Abraham, what God means is that you should take my handmaid, Hagar, and raise up a seed through her.

[32:06] That's how God's going to keep his promise. We'll help him. That's what happens when we're made to wait long and we lose patience and we lose expectancy. We start trying to connive how we can pull this off rather than looking to the Lord.

Good. Other sins that we're in danger of when we have to wait long for a promise. Yes, Amber? Discouragement and then lack of faith.

All right. We can actually grow despondent and despairing and depressed and discouraged because we do not believe God's promise.

What else? Complaining. We're not happy with our situation of waiting. Many, many sins. And we need to guard against those sins.

Well, how do we guard against them? How do we wait long with patience and expectation? Well, we come back to the promiser. Remember, the promises are meant to drive us to the promiser.

[33:16] And you start to think about, who is it that's made this promise to me? And what blood was shed to guarantee this promise to me? And you begin to see why your unbelief is so unreasonable.

Well, William O'Brockel, a Dutch theologian, a couple hundred years ago or 300 years ago, wrote in volume two of his theology, the benefits of waiting for the fulfillment of the promises.

The benefits of waiting. And he sets before us such benefits that are to be had from waiting for the promise that when I got done with that, I really felt I would rather wait than get the promise immediately.

And that's the reality of God and making us wait. If he's making us wait, is it because, as Karen said, because he doesn't love us and he wants to see us squirm and make it hard for us and just make us miserable?

Or is it that, as number one says, by way of postponement, God is preparing us to receive and make better use of the thing promised when he does give it?

[34:37] He has this lovely example. Just as one first cleanses and prepares a vessel before putting a delightful beverage in it, you wouldn't keep your old scum in there and lest it flavor.

So before you serve up a beverage in it, you cleanse the vessel. So the Lord does with us. Before he gives us the fulfillment of the promise, he first cleanses the vessel so that when he gives us the promise, it will bless us all the more and we will enjoy it all the more and make better use of it.

In other words, God is more concerned with doing us good and making us holy than he is in immediately making us happy and giving us immediately what it is that we want to see in the way of the promise fulfilled.

He has a higher agenda, if you will, in weighing out when shall I fulfill my promise to her. Well, I know she wants it now, but you know what would be better for her?

If I made her wait and I made her plead the promise more than once, more than a day, more than a month, more than a year, and I made her grow in her faith and her dependence upon me to where she's coming to me and clinging to me, and at the end of that time of waiting, we will have a much closer relationship so that when I finally give her the blessing, it will bless her socks off.

[36:02] It will do more for her then than if I just gave it to her the first time. You ever, maybe you don't have peach trees, I don't either, but let's suppose you've got a peach.

You've eaten peaches before they're ripe, haven't you? Suppose you've got a peach tree and there's one peach on it and you're so anxious to have it, you pick it before it's ripe.

Well, you pay the price, don't you? You don't know the joy of a tree-ripened peach. And if God is making you wait, it is only that the promise might ripen.

And do you the much better good when it does come. And part of that good that comes when it does come, it makes you more thankful, more thankful for that promise than had he given it to you at the first asking.

Well, my time is gone, but that leads us to the last point of dealing with the promises. After praying the promises and waiting patiently and expectantly for them, when God fulfills them, we need to come back with thanksgiving.

[37:09] And with the promise in our hand, Psalms 50, 15. Call on me in the day of trouble. That's pleading the promise. Lord, you said you'd be an ever-present help in trouble.

I'm in trouble. Call on me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you. Step two. And step three, you will honor me. And we honor him with thanksgiving.

I will praise God's name and song and glorify, honor him with thanksgiving. So upon receiving the thing promised, we give thanks. Not only for the goodness in giving the blessing, that's just half of it, but also for his faithfulness in keeping his promise.

And that's the part I often miss in my thanksgiving. Not just thank you, Lord, for that good gift, but Lord, thank you for keeping your promise.

So just as we start by finding a promise and laying hold of it and memorizing and meditating on it and holding on to that promise, presenting it in prayer, we need to keep holding on to that promise while we're waiting.

[38:17] Even so, we need to hold on to that promise when we come back to God and thank him and even quote it back to him. Lord, you said this. You said you would be an ever-present help in trouble, and I thank you that today I found your help in my trouble.

We bring the promise back to him with thanksgiving. That's what Moses did in Exodus 12, 41. It says, 430 years to the day, he kept his promise as he comes to give thanks for bringing them out of Egypt.

And Joshua, when finally brought into the promised land, did the same thing as the Lord gave them rest from all their enemies. He notes that the blessing had been promised to them by God, and so God receives thanks, not only for his goodness, but for his faithfulness in keeping his word.

Well, our time's gone. Let's lay hold of the opportunities that waiting has to glorify God. He's glorified when his people are clinging to a naked promise, when circumstances don't look promising, but the promise is always promising, and they hang on to that with hope and with expectation.

Go and honor God by waiting for him. We're dismissed. Thank you.