

God's Promises to Us

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[0 : 00] If you could turn down your Bibles, please, to Zechariah chapter 8. Just have that open. And just before we turn to it, we'll pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the words that we have sung. We thank you for the hope which we have, the hope that draws us here tonight. The hope that was promised over the years and was realised in Christ.

We thank you that to us a child has been born. We thank you that he is the Saviour. He is the Prince of Peace. We thank you that his reign shall know no end.

And we pray that each one of us this evening, as we gather in the name of Jesus, would be found putting our faith in Jesus, trusting in him. We thank you, Lord, the promises of Scripture that we see fulfilled in Christ are not only promises that we can look at from a distance, but they're promises that we can and we must take hold of by faith.

Lord God, we thank you that you have looked upon us in mercy. As we sang in the Psalm, you haven't treated us as our sins deserved, because you are the God who treated Christ as our sins deserved.

[1 : 25] And we thank you, Lord, that if we trust in him, though our sins are as scarlet, they are made as white as snow through all that he has done on our behalf.

So help us, we pray, to know the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Help us, we pray, to know the assurance that we have eternal life.

What a tragedy it would be for us to know intellectually that there was salvation and that there was eternal life and yet never to grasp it by faith. So may each one of us, Lord, we pray, take you at your word and take hold of the amazing gift of salvation in and through Jesus.

We ask that you would open your word to us and that you would open our hearts to your word as we gather here just now. Take away every distracting thought and speak into our hearts, we pray.

We pray for not only ourselves, but for every congregation that's around us and the different denominations in this village and across the island and these islands and across the nation and across all nations.

[2 : 37] We pray that the Lord Jesus would be lifted up in worship and many more would be drawn in faith to him. We ask, Lord, that you would help each one of us. You know our needs, you know the things that weigh heavily upon our minds, you know the anxieties that we have and the things that preoccupy our minds and we pray that you would help us.

And Lord, as we take our worries and our concerns and our anxieties to you in prayer, we ask that you would help us by faith to leave them with you, knowing that you are the God who is able to do far more than we can ask or think.

We do pray for those who are grieving at this time and we ask, Lord, that you would comfort them. Those who prepare to go to funerals in the course of this week and we ask that they would know your presence with them as they travel and as they bow in your presence in these services of worship.

We pray, Lord, for those who may have anxiety in their minds as they wait for results to come through from hospital and wonder the course, the direction of treatment over the next period.

We ask, Lord, that they would be given the peace of God which passes all understanding. We pray for those who struggle with addictions at this time of year especially and who seem to keep on falling and not be able to get any kind of release.

[4 : 05] And we ask, Father, that they would look to Jesus, the one who is able to set the captives free. We pray for those who struggle with this time of year, those who have memories and who think about those who are once with them and who are no longer with them.

And we pray that you would be very near to them and give them your strength and your upholding over this period. And help us, Lord, at this time of year when we hear the carols and when we see so many signs that point us to Christ.

Enable us, we pray, to take the opportunities that you give to us to speak a word in season that points those who are who are celebrating in the festivities to the one who is the reason for all that we do.

So hear our prayers and help us now as we turn to your word. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Some here may have, in the past few weeks, been watching the television programme The Apprentice.

And if you haven't been watching it, you're probably aware of what it is. We have Alan Sugar who's looking for a business partner. And week by week, we see these business candidates and they go through various challenges.

[5 : 30] And when they do well, they get a reward. And when they do badly, they may get a chance or two. But very quickly, they get fired.

And for those who haven't seen The Apprentice, you'll have seen the football on television. Boys and girls, you know what the football's like on television. And sometimes you can be watching a match and the match is going on and there might be one player and his temperature, he's getting more and more into the game.

He's starting to get a bit animated. He's starting to get more and more excited. And his temper is starting to go and he slides in on a tackle. Crunch. Down goes the other player.

What does the referee do? Teaches for his pocket, doesn't he? Out with a warning card. Yellow card. Five minutes later, same thing happens. Same player slides in.

Crash. What happens next? Yeah? Red card out. One warning, second strike, you're off.

[6 : 39] You're fired. Now God's people, as we turn to this passage here, God's people, Israel, in the Old Testament, and we kind of widen the angle of all this, did they always do things right?

Well, even the children are giving me the answers, but I'm not even looking for them. They didn't. Did they always trust and obey God?

No, they didn't. Did they always remain faithful to God over the years? Far from it. Time and time again, God's people, Israel, they made a mess of things.

Time and time again, even though they were warned not to, they wandered away from God. They worshipped idols. They rebelled against God. And at the end of chapter 7, where we were last week, God is speaking to Zechariah about that.

He speaks to Zechariah and to God's people at that time about the days gone by when they, as we see in verses 11 and 12, as the chapter comes to an end, how God's people, they refused to pay attention, it says.

[7 : 51] Stubbornly, they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the word that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets.

So the Lord Almighty was very angry. Boys and girls, can you imagine that? Can you imagine if your mother or your father or your teacher is speaking to you and you, whilst they're speaking to you, you turn your back on them and you carry on speaking and you stop up your ears.

and your heart goes as hard as the hardest stone. What do you think your mum or your dad or your teacher would do?

Be very angry. And Zechariah 7 finishes with God saying to Zechariah that he had been angry with his people for good reason.

But what comes next? Does God fire his people? Does he say you've had a couple of chances?

[9 : 13] You're fired. Does he show them the red card? Say you've had warning after warning away with you. No, he doesn't.

As we sang in the first psalm, God is a God of grace. When we deserve the worst, he's a God who gives us the best.

He's a God who is slow to anger. Doesn't fly off the handle like we do. He's a God who's patient. Who's kind.

Who is abounding in love. And we see that and we hear that and the promises that God makes to his people in Zechariah chapter 8. When we might expect as God speaks of his anger, of God to move from anger to judgment, God in Zechariah chapter 8 he moves from anger to grace.

And this is a promise that is just jam-packed full of promises of God's grace to his people. So if you want to be encouraged, then tune in and listen to what God has to say not just to them but to us.

[10 : 40] And I want to look at this tonight and I want to finish looking at this next Sunday night all being well. And I want to see in this chapter how every one of these promises actually that God gives to his people is fulfilled in and through Jesus.

So what does God say? The first thing he says to his people is I love you. I love you.

Verse 1 Again the word of the Lord Almighty came to me. This is what the Lord Almighty says I am very jealous for Zion. I am burning with jealousy for her.

This is not the first time that God said this either to his people. In the first chapter of Zechariah it says in verse 14 the angel of the Lord who was speaking to me said proclaim this word this is what the Lord Almighty says I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion.

Now when you and I think about jealousy we tend to think of jealousy as a bad thing. Something that boils up within us. Something that causes us to think dark thoughts.

[12 : 03] Something that sometimes causes us to say things that we regret saying afterwards. But sometimes jealousy is not a bad thing. sometimes when we see someone that we genuinely and deeply love being drawn away from us by someone who does not love them and being taken down at a dark destructive path to be concerned and to be jealous is actually the right thing.

and that's what God kept seeing in his people. How many times do we see in the nation of Israel that she wanders from God and she mistrusts God and she allows herself as a nation to be lured away and sometimes she doesn't even need to be lured away she she just decides she's going to wander off her own way.

So many times God's people Israel they were unfaithful and God says to them I am very jealous for you I am burning with jealousy for you when I see you stray and what God said to his people back then he says to me and he says to you this evening we are a people who are prone to wander they so often sing it we are a people who are prone to mistrust

God and to doubt his promises we are a people who are prone to leave and stray from the God that we love we are prone to unfaithfulness and so what God says to them he says to us he says I am very jealous for you if you are here tonight and you know in your heart that you are drifting from God you are far away from the God that you once were close to God is saying to you as he says to me I am jealous for you God is saying when I see you stray when I see your Bible closed day after day and your apps open when I see that your prayer life has dried up but your gossip life is in overdrive when I see you taking the hand of another

God and going off in a direction that is not good for your soul and not glorifying to your name I am jealous because of my great love for you God's promise to them God's promise to us love is that he loves us how do we know it's true how do we know that God loves us because of Jesus 1 John 4 this is how God showed his love among us he sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him this is love not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins if you and I need a reminder of God's love for us we need only to look to

[16 : 35] Christ and to his cross some of you remember the man that began road to recovery here I didn't ever meet him but I've heard of his name many times Stan Gowdy and my understanding is he was a man who was struggling he was at an end of himself he was ruining his life with drink he was far from God he was struggling with the weight of sin on his shoulder he felt a sense of worthlessness and somebody came alongside him and put their hand on his shoulder and said Stan God loves you Jesus loves you and that was a word that was a promise that transformed his life and maybe that's a promise that you and I need to hear again tonight and maybe it's a promise that we need to take hold of by faith

God loves you it's so simple then it's so simple we can sometimes overlook it and yet this is something that we need to keep on hearing in a healthy relationship in a healthy marriage you don't say on day one to the one that you love I love you and then never say it again it's something that keeps on needing to be said it doesn't lose its meaning and God says to us time and time again and he says to us again tonight my promise is I love you even though you fail even though you fall even though you and

I stray even though we are unfaithful God remains faithful in his love to us and when we doubt it we need only look to Jesus the one who came to Bethlehem's cradle in order to go to Calvary's cross the first promise we have here in this chapter is God's promise that he loves us the second promise that we have here in this chapter is that God will not leave us verse 3 this is what the Lord says I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem then Jerusalem will be called the city of truth and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the holy mountain if we think about this again in terms of just our own human relationships if we're in a relationship whether it's a friendship or a business partnership or a marriage and if we find ourselves in a relationship where the partner that we trusted keeps on behaving consistently and determinedly in a way that hurts us we have a partner in whatever context and they keep on being deceitful and they keep on being determinedly unfaithful for most of us after a period we'd say we can't bear this anymore we'd leave be the end of the business be the end of the friendship we walk away when we're in that kind of relationship and yet what does

God say to his unfaithful people what does God say to people whom he had every right to be angry with so many times well he says to them I will not leave you but actually I will come close to you I will return to you and time and time again God did at this point in the in the history of the nation of Israel they're making good progress the temple building is going up Jerusalem which was in ruins is starting to look like a place of glory and blessing again why was that was that because of their engineering skills was it because of their great talents and great resources no it was because God had promised and made good in his promise that he would not leave them but as they turned to him he would return to them and he would give strength to their arms so even as God spoke just now through

Zechariah they were enjoying the benefits of knowing that God had not left them even though they'd been unfaithful even though they'd left God God hadn't left them and they knew something of the blessing of that but that promise that God made to them was a promise that was not only fulfilled in some small measure in that snapshot in time but this was a promise that was going to be fulfilled in greater measure as the centuries went on because there was one who was coming God the Son the Word became flesh and he made us dwelling amongst us God in his great love for us did not leave us hopeless in our sin but he came to us in Christ he made his dwelling amongst us

[23 : 19] God the Son left the realms of glory so that we would not be left with no hope and no salvation and no way of being reconciled with him and when Jesus came to this world do you remember the promise that he made to his disciples in Matthew 28 as he sent them out with the gospel message he says to them I will never leave you and never forsake you but I will be with you always to the very end of time God's promise to his people of his undying eternal gracious love for them for us God's promise to his people that he would not leave them not in 518

BC and still not in 2019 AD God says I will not leave you others may leave you but I will not leave you and you know the ultimate fulfillment of that promise is heaven John gets a glimpse of it he says then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea I saw the holy city the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne listen to this and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God heaven is heaven because of

God's eternal presence with us perfectly the sin that we struggle with the sin that creates a distance the sin that causes us to feel remote from God is gone and there is that perfect eternal assurance of God's presence with us God's promise is a promise that he loves us God's promise is a promise that he will never leave us and that's where we're going to leave things tonight so let's pray our heavenly father we thank you for your grace we thank you that as we look at this passage we see not only a rebellious wayward fickle nation who were prone to wander and prone to shake their fist at you but we see a mirror image of ourselves our own hearts because we confess lord that we like

Israel of old are prone to wonder we are prone to sin we are prone to stray we are prone to take the hand of other gods and yet we thank you that this evening we have the reassurance that just as you are a god who was jealous for your people of old when they headed off in a direction away from you you are the god who is jealous for your people now because of your great love for your people and help us we pray to know that to believe that and when we doubt not to allow ourselves to sink into doubt but to look once more to Jesus and to his cross and to the wonder of all that he came from heaven to earth to do so that we could be saved we thank you lord for the promise of Christ that you will never leave us that you will never forsake us that when we trust you though we may feel attacks and though we may know the reality of the devil's pool we thank you that there is no one and there is nothing that can snatch us from your hand and we thank you lord that your promise of old is a promise that is good this evening a promise that we see fulfilled in

Christ I will never leave you nor forsake you but I am with you always to the end of time enable us we pray to live in the light of that promise and with the assurance of Christ in us and Christ with us we pray this in Jesus name Amen