

SEVEN PROMISES

From the Words of Jesus



HOLY
BIBLE

R. Herbert

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By R. Herbert

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INTRODUCTION

The promises recorded in the Bible are among the most important words in the Scriptures – and there are literally thousands of them! In fact, it has been estimated that almost seven thousand promises can be found between the opening chapter of Genesis and the final chapter of Revelation. But are all these promises important, and how do we recognize the ones that are significant for us?

Of course, a promise is only as good as the person making it, and some promises recorded in the Bible are actually lies – as we see in Matthew 4:9 where Satan is recorded as saying “All this I will give you ... if you will bow down and worship me.” Other promises, made by humans, could not always be counted on – as when a teacher of the law said to Jesus “I will follow you wherever you go” but did not (Matthew 8:19). Even when we look only at the true promises made by God, we see different types.

For example, there is often a difference between promises and prophecies. In one way, a prophecy is simply a promise about the future made by God, but many prophecies apply to events that are now past and many others are conditional – they would only occur if and when certain conditions occur. As the apostle Paul wrote, prophecies may “fail” or not come to pass for various reasons (1 Corinthians 13:8). But there are other promises of ongoing help that God makes to those who love and obey him that are unconditional and will never fail (1 Kings 8:56).

Even when we “narrow the field,” as we do in this book, by looking specifically at the promises made by Jesus during his earthly ministry, there are hundreds of promises that could be considered. Yet many of these are prophecies that apply, for example, only to those who reject God, while others are clear promises made to those who submit their lives to God and strive to obey him. That type of promise is of particular interest and

importance to every believer, and it is on those promises that we focus in this book.

We can recognize these particularly significant promises in a simple and helpful way. A promise is almost always preceded by the words “I will” followed by what the individual promises to do. Many Christians are familiar with the seven “I AM” statements made by Jesus that are recorded in the Gospel of John (John 8:12; etc.) and that explain aspects of his nature. Jesus’ “I WILL” statements record his promises and are similar to the “I AM” statements, but less familiar to many believers. These “I WILL” statements are especially important, showing Jesus’ personal involvement in the fulfilling of God’s purposes. But even here we can narrow the field to get to the most significant of all the promises Jesus made. For the purposes of seeing those core promises, we can set aside the following:

1) Promises made by Jesus that applied only to him. For example: “I tell you *I will* not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:18), and “After three days *I will* rise again” (Matthew 27:63).

2) Promises of Jesus that were spoken to specific people and were conditional. For example, speaking to those who tried to trap him, Jesus said: “If you answer me, *I will* tell you by what authority I am doing these things” (Matthew 21:24), and to the Church at Ephesus, “If you do not repent, *I will* come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (Revelation 2:5).

3) Promises that were unconditional, but made to individuals in Jesus’ time. For example, “after I have risen, *I will* go ahead of you into Galilee” (Matthew 26:32), and “*I will* keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day *I will* reach my goal” (Luke 13:32).

If we set the above types of promises aside, *seven* specific, unconditional, ongoing, and completely trustworthy promises are left that Jesus made regarding his relationship with his followers. These “I will” promises are of gifts that he would bestow on believers in every age – and they apply as much to you personally as to anyone else in history. It is these seven wonderful promises that this book examines.

The promises are arranged in order of their application to us as followers of Christ – from when we first come to him, through his interaction with us in various aspects of the Christian life, to the eternal future we are promised to share with him. There are no more important promises that apply to you than these!

1. ACCEPTANCE

*“All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me **I will** never drive away.” (John 6:37)*

You have probably heard the old saying: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” Although our journey to Christ need not be a long one, the first step is certainly the most important. It is this initial step that Jesus spoke of in the first of his “I will” promises that we examine in this book.

The context of his promise is an interesting one. The sixth chapter of John contains – from a human perspective – both the high point and the low point of Jesus’ ministry. At the beginning of the chapter, we see that Jesus was extremely popular and many wanted to make him a king (vss. 2, 14–15). But by the end of the chapter we see that a great many of those who were following him had turned away (vs. 66). It is at this time that Jesus explained to his remaining disciples why so many had deserted him, and gave a promise that he, on the other hand, would never reject those who came to him.

There is far more to this statement than first meets the eye. As we will see, John 6:37 is a summary of some of the most important aspects of salvation – the role played by God the Father, our own role, and the role of Jesus himself – with a transcendent promise attached! We can better understand these roles and be greatly encouraged by the promise if we examine each part of Jesus’ statement carefully.

The Father’s Role

The first half of Jesus’ promise: “All those the Father gives me will come to me” is packed with meaning and significance. In the Greek

in which the New Testament was written, the word “All” is impersonal and signifies a large group, while those who “come” are viewed differently – on an individual level. This shows that although we may be given to Christ as part of a group, without our own will being involved, each individual can, if so minded, refuse to come. All of the twelve disciples were given to Christ, but not all came to him (John 17:12). As Christ told many of the Jews of his day, “you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:40).

The promise also shows that we can only come to Christ when God the Father draws us and opens our minds to understand the truth of salvation – then we are free to come. This gives us an insight into the unity of the Father and the Son that Jesus emphasized (John 10:30) – the Father is the way to the Son, and the Son is then the way to the Father (John 14:6). Yet the role of the Father remains primary as Jesus also made clear: “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand” (John 10:29). This is good news in itself! Once God gives us the opportunity to come to Christ, no one and nothing can stop that occurring if we ourselves accept the opportunity. The crucified thief who turned to Christ provides a clear biblical example of this (Luke 23:39-43).

Our Role

To come to Christ means that we recognize our need of his help and believe that he can help us. It means we come to him understanding that we are sinful, needy, and wretched, and that we cast ourselves on his mercy as the only one who can save us. This is all implied in the simple Old Testament promise “everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved” (Joel 2:32 and see Romans 10:13). But the emphasis there is on “everyone” – the throwing open of the doors of salvation – rather than on what else we may need to do to enter. Jesus referred to this part of our role in the context of his promise: “my Father's will is that everyone who *looks* to the Son and *believes* in him shall have eternal life” (John 6:40).

Here, we see the Father's role in salvation again, but with a clarification regarding our own roles: those who come to Christ must both look to the Son and also believe in him. Many scholars have commented that "looks to" (NIV) and "looks on" (ESV) or "sees" (KJV; etc.) are really not strong enough translations. The Greek word means to look in the sense of "contemplate," and this is our first responsibility in coming to Christ – that we must think through his invitation and our response carefully. Thousands of people saw and heard Jesus during his physical ministry, but few deeply contemplated what he taught (John 6:36).

Once we have contemplated what Christ tells us, we must actively come to Christ – seek him and move our will toward his in a repentant attitude. This is what Jesus meant when he said: "Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me" (John 6:45). In fact, the Greek word for "come" in these verses is not the usual one which simply expresses the act of movement toward someone or something, but one which usually denotes coming in the sense of arriving. There is no "partly coming" to Christ, we must set out and arrive!

The final part of our responsibility is that we believe in Christ – as he himself said (John 3:15), and as we read continually in the New Testament (John 3:16–18; Romans 10:9; etc.). We will look at this aspect of our role in more detail later in this book (Chapter 5), but for now we can conclude by seeing how Jesus put these two aspects of coming and believing together when he said: "I am the bread of life. He who *comes* to me will not be hungry, and he who *believes* in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

Christ's Role

The last part of Christ's promise: "whoever comes to me I will never drive away," shows his own role in that he will *accept* all who come sincerely and – if they continue – never *reject* them. This is a double promise of amazing implication. It means that our past sins and present condition are no hindrance to his acceptance – that he

will never refuse to save anyone who does turn to him. But notice the repeated emphasis on coming: it is not those who merely profess Christ, but those who *actually come* to him who he will not reject or cast away. Responding to an altar call to “come to Christ” and saying we will is not the same as actually doing that – just as booking a vacation and actually leaving and going on the vacation are not the same. But when we truly turn to Christ and begin to move our lives toward him, his guarantee of acceptance is absolute!

Jesus’ words also mean that once we come to him he will not turn from us whatever our failures, as long as we remain repentant and desire to stay with him. This brings us full circle to the will of God that Jesus stressed at the beginning of his promise: “this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me” (John 6:39). And, as he also said, it is the Father’s will that he give eternal life to all the Father has given him (John 17:2). This does not mean, of course, that Christians can routinely disobey God because he has guaranteed that we will not be cast away (Philippians 2:12–13). What this promise of Jesus does mean is that God has made salvation available to all those who come to Christ. And those who truly come to him will never be rejected. When we are discouraged because of our past or present failures, we can turn to the words of this promise. There are few more encouraging words in the New Testament than those found in these words: “*All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.*”

2. HELP

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:16–18 ESV).

When we first come to Christ, we may think that is the greater part – or even the totality – of our Christian journey. But we soon realize that in reality, coming to Christ is only the beginning of a journey with him that will continue to the end of our lives. We also learn quickly that this is not a journey we will be able to complete without his guidance, help, and support. Fortunately, that was all included in God’s plan, and the “I will” promise of Jesus that we look at now speaks directly to our needs in walking with him.

When Jesus said “I will come to you” (vs. 18), he did not mean that he would appear to us, of course, but that he would be present with us through the indwelling of the Spirit of God in our minds. This truth is seen in scriptures such as “No one has ever seen God; but ... [we] know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:12–13), and “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The Unity of the Spirit

In the promise of Jesus we examined in the first chapter of this book, we saw that connected but separate roles are played in the fulfillment of the promise by God the Father, Jesus himself, and by us. In the promise we are looking at here, however, we see that once a believer has come to Christ, there is an amazing unity in the roles of the Father and the Son:

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me” (John 15:26).

“Christ lives within you ... The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you” (Romans 8:10-11 NLT).

“God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:6 ESV).

When we put these verses – and others like them – together, we see the Holy Spirit is called both the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son, and is said to be sent by both the Father and sent by Christ! This is, of course, because the Father and Son are one (John 10:30), and when we receive the Spirit of God we too are drawn into that unity: receiving the Spirit of Christ unites us to him so that “whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.” (1 Corinthians 6:17). This is what Jesus meant when he said “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” (John 14:20-21).

The Spirit of God unites us with God, makes us children of God (Romans 8:15), and gives us spiritual life – enabling our eventual entrance into the kingdom of God (John 3:5–8; Ephesians 1:13–14). The Spirit also aids us in our everyday Christian lives, and this was the purpose of Jesus’ promise.

The Helper

When Jesus told his disciples he would send the Holy Spirit to aid them (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), the Greek word the New Testament uses is *parakletos* which means “one who is called to the side of another.” The purpose of this calling alongside could be to assist, comfort, counsel, or support. That is why we find various Bible versions translate the word in different ways – as “Advocate” (NIV, NLT, etc.), “Comforter” (KJV, ASV, etc.), “Counselor” (CSB,

WEB, etc.), and “Helper” (ESV, BLB, ISV, NASB, NKJV, etc.). Of these various translations, “Helper” is perhaps the best because it is the broadest term and contains all the other ideas within it and is now used by the majority of English Bible versions.

We can see the nature of the Helper in that Jesus said “*another Helper*” (John 14:16) meaning another helper *like himself*. During his earthly ministry Jesus had counseled, guided, comforted, corrected, and helped his followers on innumerable occasions. The Helper he promised would do exactly the same things because the Spirit of God is the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7; Romans 8:10; etc.), as we saw above. Even though he is now in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father (Mark 16:19; Acts 7:55–56; etc.), Jesus is able to be with us through his Spirit. As he said, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18) – and the purpose of his coming to us is to help us.

The Help We Are Given

The help Jesus promised to give us through his Spirit is astonishingly broad. Perhaps the best way we can grasp the amazing range of this promise is to simply list the ways in which we are told the Spirit works with us. These ways include (but are not limited to!) the fact that the Helper:

- 1) Makes us a part of the Church, giving us the encouragement of unity and fellowship with other believers (2 Corinthians 13:14; Romans 1:11–12; Philippians 1:1–2).
- 2) Guides us into truth by helping us to understand and apply the word of God in our daily lives (1 Corinthians 2:12).
- 3) Is grieved when we sin (Ephesians 4:30) and helps us to repent – leading to forgiveness (John 16:8) and restoration (1 John 1:9).

- 4) Helps us to pray, interceding for us with God (Romans 8:26–27).
- 5) Empowers us to do God’s will (Galatians 5:16) and to live righteously (Romans 8:14).
- 6) Produces the “fruits” of the Spirit – qualities of the character of God – in our lives (Galatians 5:22–23).
- 7) Gives spiritual “gifts” to us to help us serve God and his people (1 Corinthians 12:11).
- 8) Gives us peace, comforting us so that we are not troubled or afraid (John 14:27; Philippians 1:19).
- 9) Gives us the joy Jesus had and has now (John 15:11; Acts 13:52).
- 10) Gives us God’s love, enabling us to love God and others more than we ever could by ourselves (John 15:9–10).

Never-Failing Help

We should not view these many attributes of the Helper in an abstract way – as simply a resume or c.v. of the Spirit of God. Rather, they are specific guarantees of personal help that Jesus promised every believer, which would always be available to us.

In Old Testament times, the Spirit of God often came on individuals to accomplish specific things through them, then left them (Judges 3:10; etc.). But in the New Testament, when the Holy Spirit was sent to Jesus’ followers, it was given to remain with them and to help them always, as long as we remain with Christ. As Jesus himself said, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus knew he would be able to be with us through his Spirit and that was the basis for his promise of ongoing and never failing help.

3. SERVICE

“I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” (John 14:13)

This promise is almost startling in its extent, but it also includes two important limits that we might not notice if we do not think about it. The extent of Jesus’ promise is as clear as it is amazing – that he will do whatever we ask if we ask as we should – and it is so clear that we hardly need comment on it. Jesus makes no half promise, but assures us that he will do whatever we ask as a matter of service on our behalf. But all too often sincere believers try to claim this promise without understanding the nature of what Jesus offers us, and the result may be disappointment.

This promise was never intended to be a guarantee of divine help in any and all circumstances. It is not a spiritual “vending machine” that promises divine assistance whenever we would like it. But when we understand the true nature of what Jesus promised, we see what an incredible gift it really is. First, we will look at the two limitations Jesus placed on this promise.

In His Name

The first limitation Jesus places on his promise of assistance is simple enough, but we must be sure that we understand it properly. The words “whatever you ask in my name” do not mean, of course, that the mere use of the formula “In Jesus’ name” or “in the name of Jesus” is some kind of magical spell that miraculously makes things happen. The words are not a reminder to God that we have a written guarantee of answered prayer – as many scriptures show (Acts 19:13; 2 Corinthians 12:8–9; etc.).

Most Bible readers realize that “in Jesus’ name” often means that something is being done with the authority of Jesus or “on Jesus’

behalf.” But the expression can also have a number of other, quite different meanings in the New Testament. In fact, “by Jesus’ authority” is only one of seven meanings of “in Jesus’ name” and it is good to be aware of all seven of the ways the New Testament uses this expression.

1) *By Jesus’ authority.* This is one of the most common meanings the New Testament gives to “in Jesus’ name.”

2) *Proclaiming the Gospel.* In the book of Acts we read that the Jewish leaders commanded the disciples using “in the name of Jesus,” but they certainly did not speak by his authority. “Then they called [the disciples] ... and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). This simply means the disciples were told not to teach the gospel Jesus taught (see also Acts 5:40).

3) *Speaking or acting with the character of Jesus.* In biblical times, a person’s name was often related to the character of the individual. In this sense, to say or do something in Jesus’ name is to do it as Jesus would – as when Paul wrote “In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5 NCV).

4) *Doing something as if it were for Jesus.* There are verses where “in Jesus’ name” means doing something as if we were doing them for Christ – as when Paul wrote: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Colossians 3:23). Whatever we do – whether our jobs, feeding our families, or simply mowing our lawns – we can do things as though we do them for Christ.

5) *Giving thanks through Jesus.* Paul shows this meaning of “in the name of Jesus” when he wrote that we should be “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20). As our intermediary, Jesus conveys

our thanks to the Father – in his name – and we are “giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).

6) *Aligning our will with that of God.* Doing something “in the name of Jesus” can sometimes mean we align our will and our petitions with his. This meaning does not stress the authority of Jesus, but his way of praying and doing everything according to the Father’s will.

7) *Into the name or body of Jesus.* The Greek preposition *eis* translated as “in” in the phrase “in the name of Jesus” also means “into,” and this appears to be the meaning in a number of verses that speak of people being baptized in Jesus’ name. We read, for example: “they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5 ASV, BSB, CSB, etc.). This is because we are baptized into the body of Christ: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13 ESV).

So there are seven different meanings to the expression “in the name of Jesus” in the New Testament, and we must look carefully at the context where the words occur to see how they are being used. But all these meanings are covered by what Jesus meant when he said “*I will do whatever you ask in my name*” – as we can see when we look at the second limitation he placed on his promise.

Glorifying the Father

After saying “whatever you ask in my name” Jesus added a second condition to his promise – “*that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*” This second condition clarifies the first for us. It shows us that the things we may ask Jesus to do, in his name, are not primarily for our own needs or desires, but things that will glorify God through his Son’s work. This is not to say, of course, that prayers for other reasons are never granted by God. Jesus taught us to pray for our daily needs (Matthew 6:11), but in the John 14:13

promise it is not our needs, but God's purposes that are addressed.

For example, the prayer "Father, please make me well, in Jesus' name" may or may not be answered by God at this time, but the prayer "Father, give me the strength I need to complete the work I know you have given me to do today" carries with it the understanding that we are asking for something that is for God's purposes and glory – and the promise of Jesus' help.

Jesus himself tied the things for which he prayed to the glory of God. Notice just two examples from the Gospel of John: "Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:28); "This sickness will not end in death... it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4); "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him" (John 13:31).

Giving glory to God is actually a theme of John's Gospel, and he uses the expression "glorify God" repeatedly. For example, the first and the last of the seven miracles of Jesus that John records are specifically said to have been performed as manifestations of God's glory (John 2:11; John 11:4, 40). Although it is not specifically stated, the other miracles of Jesus were clearly performed with the same goal in mind.

Although we may not have the power to perform miracles, God nevertheless gives every believer the opportunity to live and to do his work in a manner that glorifies him. So when we properly understand this great promise of Jesus, we realize that it does not really cover requests for our personal needs, except as far as they are for the glory of God. For our own personal needs we have many other promises in God's word – as when the apostle Paul tells us that: "God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19 ESV).

So "If you ask anything in my name, I will do it" is not a blanket statement of how we can receive whatever we want, or even need from God, but rather a statement to tell us how we should pray relative to God's work and glory. It is in that sense, a promise to help us serve. Paul clearly indicated this when he wrote, "God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times,

having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Jesus’ great promise of help to his followers in John 14:13 was not that he would serve us in any way we might ask, but that he would personally help us serve and glorify our Father in heaven. This is the sense in which he encourages us with his promise and why, as a result, he told his followers: “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete” (John 16:24).

Jesus’ promise has one further lesson for us. It is not only a promise of his help, but a reminder that we need his help! Jesus told his disciples that even he could do nothing of himself when it came to doing God’s work and glorifying him (John 5:30). We must always remember that we, too, need Jesus’ promised help to do these things, and that when we ask it in his name it will be given – and our joy will be full.

4. REST

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30).

Many know these encouraging words by heart, but like the promises examined in the previous chapters of this book, the words of Jesus we will look at here contain a world of meaning that is easy to miss if we do not look at them closely. First, notice the double aspects of this promise: two groups are addressed – the weary and burdened; two invitations are made – to come to Christ and to take his yoke; and two promises of rest are made – “I will give you rest” and “you will find rest.” We will look at these double aspects of Jesus’ promise individually.

Come and Take

Jesus issues a dual summons to us with this promise – “come to me” and “take my yoke.” The first may seem obvious enough in its meaning, but we should note that the word “come” (Greek *deute*) used in this passage conveys a sense of “positive immediacy.” It is somewhere between an invitation and a command – perhaps best described as an urging. But it is not an urging to do something morally or otherwise necessary, rather, it is an urging to do something that would be beneficial to us. The expression also has a sense of urging action now as opposed to at some undetermined time (see, for example, Matthew 21:38; 28:6). We are urged not to hesitate, but to go quickly to claim this promise of help rather than waiting until we are discouraged or overly exhausted.

Christ then tells us that we should come to him to “take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.” Although a yoke is a wooden collar or crosspiece placed over the necks of two animals to enable them

to pull a plow or a cart, Jesus does not mean that we must take on an extra burden. A yoke allows two animals to share a load and thus pull more easily together, so Jesus humbly offers to help us pull our “load” – which is why he next says “for I am gentle and humble in heart.”

Sometimes people misunderstand this aspect of what Jesus said to mean that if we are humble we will somehow have rest. But the only aspect of our humility involved here is the humility we must show by going to Christ to ask for his help. It is then Christ’s humility that is involved in stooping to help us, to give us rest.

There is also another aspect of taking Christ’s yoke upon us that we should remember. To take a yoke upon ourselves can also mean to submit our wills to someone’s authority. Although many may be willing to “come to Jesus,” far fewer are willing to truly submit their wills to him. Yet it is sometimes to the degree that we willingly submit to Christ that our inner conflicts and struggles are resolved and we do receive rest from them.

Weary and Burdened

There is a great deal of encouragement in the fact that these words are broad enough to include every form of human toil and care. The first word is active and the second passive – in other words, “weary” covers the effects of every kind of work and activity, and “burdened” includes all the externally-caused sorrows, fears, and every other mental and emotional burden which may weigh on us.

Regarding work, it is often said that toil is a curse, but work is a blessing. Work may certainly be a blessing and a source of great joy to us when our hearts are in it, but every form of work leads eventually to a feeling of toil and exhaustion if it is not moderated. And of course, the realities of our everyday lives mean that our work so often does become tiring (Genesis 3:17). The Gospels show that even the Son of God grew weary and needed rest and sleep. Jesus likewise urged his disciples to find rest when they needed it, and the old story of the preacher who playfully paraphrased the King James

Bible wording of Mark 6:31 “Come ... apart ... and rest a while” as “Rest a while ... or come apart!” was not far from the truth. We all need rest, of course, and sometimes the need is almost crushing and this is what Jesus understood, At such times he urges us to look to him for the deep rest that he can give. As the book of Psalms says: “God gives rest to his loved ones” (Psalm 127:2 NLT) and the Son of God offers that to all who look to him.

In the same way, for many people – and perhaps for all of us at times – the psychological and emotional cares of this life can become burdens that are difficult to carry. These may be worries regarding the health and well being of our loved ones and friends, as well as concerns regarding our own situation. Psychologists know that such cares can have an ongoing and cumulative negative effect on us, but the words of Christ offer us help in this situation. We may know that Paul instructed us: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6). And we may routinely do this, but the words of Jesus remind us of the love of God that invites us – personally – to let Christ help us carry the burden of our problems. This is what the apostle Peter had in mind when he wrote “Casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you” (1 Peter 5:7 CSB).

Giving and Receiving

The final double aspect of what Jesus offered in this promise is that he said both “I will give you rest” and “you will find rest.” These are not different types of rest, but different aspects of the same rest he offers us. In the Old Testament we read that God told Moses “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:14), and in Jesus’ words “I will give you rest,” the “I” is emphasized in the Greek in which the New Testament is written. Christ stressed that he would give us something no one else can give. This is especially true of the rest he gives from the burden of sin that we all have come under. Not only is that burden lifted from us by Christ

because: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24), but also because through Christ we are given help to live without the burden of ongoing sin (John 8:34; 1 John 3:6; etc.). But Christ’s offer to give us rest applies to any burden we may bear in this life, whether physical or spiritual. It applies as much to burdens of poverty, health, or other physical difficulties as it does to guilt, anxiety, and the misguided pursuit of self-righteousness.

While Christ’s words “I will give you rest” stress his giving, his added expression “you will find rest” emphasizes our receiving of the rest he offers us. It is, as it were, an additional guarantee that he gives us of his promised rest. It is a noticeable aspect of Jesus’ teaching that he repeated expressions when he wished to emphasize something – just as he often said “truly, truly, I tell you ...” For example, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you” (John 16:23 ESV). It is in that sense that he tells us he will give us rest and we will find it – the repetition of the idea emphasizes the sure nature of the promise he gives.

Sometimes, this promise of Jesus is spiritualized by those who say it applies mainly to our future rest in God, but the context and the words Christ used show that it applies to the present life of every one of us in the here and now. The Son of God who was also the Son of Man shared both the weariness and the weakness we experience in our lives and offers – in his infinite compassion and infinite strength – to help us find the rest we need if we will simply heed his words to come to him to ask for it.

5. RENEWAL

*“For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and **I will** raise them up at the last day” (John 6:40).*

This verse in the sixth chapter of John is one of the most important passages in the New Testament. It summarizes some of the most central aspects of the Gospel – including the role of God the Father, the role of God the Son, and the role of our faith in Christ. In addition, this verse contains one of the most encouraging of all Christ’s “I will” promises – his guarantee of eternal life to those who believe! It is a verse that can well repay our study and thought.

We saw in the preceding chapter of this book that Jesus utilized repetition to emphasize the importance of some of his statements, and John 6:40 is another example as Christ’s words in this verse are extremely similar to what he said in verse 39: “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day” (John 6:39).

But the differences between the two statements are also important. While both verses show the role of God’s will regarding our salvation and eternal life, verse 40 announces Jesus’ great “I will” promise regarding eternal life. It is repeated again in verse 44: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.” In this promise Jesus reminds us that belief in him is the only path to eternal life, and that he gives us that eternal life through the resurrection. We will look closely at the two main aspects of this great promise.

The Importance of Belief

The whole sixth chapter of John is an important one that begins with Christ’s miraculous feeding of the 5,000 and includes one of

the seven “I am” statements in which he declared, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). In earlier verses in the chapter, Jesus explained this: “it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:32–33). By using this analogy of the bread, Jesus taught both the Father’s giving of his Son to the world and the Son’s giving of life to those who turn to him. As Jesus himself prayed: “For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him” (John 17:2).

Jesus’ insistence that he is the One who gives eternal life to us underlies the importance of our belief in him and is central to much of what we read in John 6. For example, when the people asked him “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus replied “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (John 6:28–29). Yet most people were reluctant to believe that the man Jesus was the Son of God – as we see in Jesus’ comments “you have seen me and still you do not believe” (John 6:36) and “The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe” (John 6:63–64).

That is why Jesus said “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life” (John 3:36), but his promise emphasizes that “everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life” (John 6:40). Our role could not be simpler – we have it on Christ’s authority that we are not given eternal life through works that we must strive to produce, rather we are given this inestimable gift simply as a result of our faith in him and his faithfulness. If we believe, he promises to bestow the life that is his to give as the One sent by God. Thankfully, there are no exceptions – as we saw in the first chapter of this book – Jesus promises that he will accept all those God the Father gives him (John 6:37) and who look to him in faith (John 6:40).

The Hope of the Resurrection

The Bible appears to be purposely vague when it comes to details of the next life – so it is perhaps not surprising that there are almost as many ideas on exactly what life in eternity will be like as there are denominations in this life! Some Christians believe that at death people are judged and immediately sent to their eternal destinations. Others believe that at death everyone “sleeps” until the resurrection and final judgment. Still others think that the souls or spirits of those who die are held in a “temporary” heaven or hell awaiting the final resurrection and judgment. But the Scriptures do make two things clear regarding eternal life – that it comes only through Jesus Christ, as we saw above, and that it is given to us through a resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:13).

The resurrection is a concept that we already find in the Old Testament – for example, when an angel told Daniel “As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance” (Daniel 12:13). But the resurrection is made clearer in the New Testament. It is what Jesus had in mind regarding believers when he said “I will raise them up at the last day” (John 6:39), and when he repeated this truth in his promise of John 6:40, and yet again in John 6:44 and John 6:54. The “I” in these verses is emphatic in the Greek of the New Testament – it is Jesus alone who will raise up the faithful at the last day.

Jesus emphasized the resurrection to his disciples repeatedly – as we see in John’s Gospel leading up to Christ’s promise of John 6:40. Notice, for example:

Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live ... Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their

graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:24–29)

In addition to the words of Jesus himself, Paul clarifies this, stating that we will be raised at the return of Christ: “But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back” (1 Corinthians 15:23 NLT). In 1 Thessalonians Paul also tells us that the resurrection will occur when Christ returns:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)

The renewal that God will work in us at that time – what theologians refer to as our “glorification”— is not explained in detail, yet it is clear that we will be granted eternal bodies like Christ, just as John explains in his first epistle: “now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). It is not surprising that Paul follows his explanation of the resurrection to the Thessalonians by urging his readers “Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

Living Belief and Eternal Life

No matter how blessed we may be in this physical life, we all suffer in some ways, we all become sick, and eventually grow old. Jesus’ promise of renewal and eternal life is all the more wonderful for

that. But this is very different from the common belief that whenever any person dies they simply go to heaven whether they have faith in the Son of God or not.

Jesus' promise of John 6:40 shows that our belief in him in this life is tied to our life in him in eternity – the two aspects of salvation are inseparable. This is because, in a very real way, eternal life is not just an event – it is a person: the person of Christ. As Jesus told Martha “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die” (John 11:25–26). In his first epistle, John summarizes the teaching of Jesus in this regard: “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11).

Jesus clothed himself in humanity in order to unite himself to us. At the resurrection, we will be fully united with him. His wonderful promise of John 6:40 affirms that he is the only path to true and everlasting life, and that if we believe in him we will be renewed in the resurrection to eternal life. As the Son of God, Jesus promises to renew and to open a door for all who believe in him. The renewal is eternal, and the door is the doorway to forever !

6. PRESENCE

*“And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will** come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* (John 14:3)

In the previous chapter we looked at Jesus’ great promise of renewal for those who believe in him. Superlative as that promise is, it simply tells us that those who turn to Christ in faith – meaning living, active, belief (John 14:12; James 2:26; etc.) – will be granted eternal life. In the promise we now look at in John 14:3, Jesus makes his promise of eternal life even more personal by tying it to his personal presence with us throughout eternity. In other words, one is a promise regarding time, the other a promise regarding location: while John 6:40 promises we will have eternal life, John 14:3 promises us eternal life with him. As we have done with the previous promises we have looked at, we will consider this promise in detail.

Jesus begins his promise by saying “If I go,” but this does not imply any kind of doubt or conditionality on his part. The expression is really no different from saying “when I go” – the emphasis is on certainty – as if he had said “as surely as I go, I will return.”

But Jesus’ words “I go” require a little more thought. They could refer to his death or his ascension as both events separated him from his disciples. The expression might also imply both events – the whole process of Christ’s physical separation from his disciples which began with his death and culminated in his return to heaven. But just as surely as he predicted his going, Jesus also predicted his return and reunion with his followers. Of course, we have union with Christ now through the indwelling of his Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:5; etc.), but in his promise of John 14:3 he was speaking of his actual presence with those who are his.

Preparing a Place

Jesus also explained that the purpose of his leaving was to prepare a place or a habitation for us after his entrance into heaven. It helps us understand the analogy Jesus used in saying this if we realize that travelers – especially pilgrims – would often send one of their number ahead of them to arrange lodging or secure rooms in the city to which the group was traveling.

During his earthly ministry Jesus often did exactly that – sending one or more of his disciples ahead of him – just as we read in Luke that “the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go” (Luke 10:1). The same situation applied, of course, when Jesus sent Peter and John ahead of him to prepare a place for the Passover meal (Luke 22:8). But in his promise of John 14:3, Jesus took the role on himself of going ahead to prepare. It was the job of a disciple or servant, but just as Jesus had shown himself as a servant in washing his disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17), he now humbly took on the responsibility of preparing an eternal place for his followers of that and every age.

Jesus gave a little more information regarding the place he would prepare for us when he said: “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?” (John 14:2). The word translated rooms (or “mansions” in older translations) can actually mean either the act of living somewhere or the place where one lives. It is a form of the Greek verb to “remain” but was often used in Greek to refer to temporary places of habitation as the word actually suggests a place of less permanence than the word “house.”

It is possible that this temporary aspect of the word ties into the analogy just explained – of someone going ahead to arrange lodging for travelers on an ongoing journey – but the temporary nature of the places or dwellings may also tie into another truth the Bible appears to teach that we will see next.

I Will Come Back

As was true of the words “I will go,” Jesus’ words “I will come back” can be understood in different ways. Christ may have meant his return through his resurrection, through the giving of his Spirit, his presence in the Church (as when he said “For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them” – Matthew 18:20 NLT), or his second coming.

The last of these meanings seems most probable as Jesus continued by telling the disciples: “I will ... take you to be with me” which best fits the context of his second advent and other verses in the New Testament that refer to Christ’s end-time return. If we understand Jesus’ words about going to prepare a place as an analogy of someone going ahead to prepare a place for travelers, then the task is not completed until the person preparing lodging returns to guide the travelers to the place that has been arranged for them. Yet the analogy should not be taken too far, and we should look primarily to what the Bible clearly states rather than what it might indicate.

If we pull together all the verses that speak of Christ’s return and the afterlife, we have a composite picture which seems to show that the spirits of those who die in Christ before his return are taken and dwell in the temporary places he said he would prepare. Thus Paul wrote that at Christ’s second coming “we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thessalonians 4:14), and:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17)

That You May Be Where I Am

However we understand the exact details of the resurrection, Paul's words to the Thessalonians – “so we will be with the Lord forever” – clearly dovetail with what Jesus said in his promise of John 14:3 – “that you also may be where I am” – and what he prayed a little later in John's account: “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am” (John 17:24.). The amazing truth of this promise is that just as we long to be with, and long to always be with, those we love – so Christ makes it clear that he desires to be with those he loves and who love him. This promise shows the depth of Christ's personal relationship with those who are his, and it transforms the concept of the resurrection from our simply being given eternal life – transcendent as that gift may be – to the even deeper and more personal truth that the resurrection is not only Christ giving us eternal life, but also granting us never-ending life with him.

7. RECOGNITION

“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32–33).

At first sight, the last of the seven “I will” promises of Jesus we will examine in this book might seem to be somewhat negative and even possibly disheartening. But, as we will see, that is not the case at all, and this is actually just as encouraging a promise as any of the other “I will”s.

There is certainly a solemn and serious aspect to be seen in the second half of this promise and we will look at that first. The context in which Matthew records Jesus’ statement shows us what that side of the promise is: Jesus was telling his disciples not to be afraid of those who would try to hinder the spread of the gospel:

So do not be afraid of them ... What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:26–31)

It is in this context that Jesus then promised his followers “whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven” (vs. 33). Jesus’ words certainly include the fact that we should always be willing to “confess” or acknowledge his existence and his Lordship (James 2:19). The apostle Paul spoke of this when he wrote “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and

believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9 ESV). All baptized Christians make this confession at baptism, and this is a basic truth: we cannot deny that Jesus is our Lord and then expect him to be our Savior. We cannot follow Jesus if we don’t want to be associated with him.

But the context of the promise of Matthew 10:32–33 shows that Jesus was primarily speaking not about a person’s unwillingness to accept him – he was, after all, speaking to his followers (Matthew 10:1–31; Luke 12:1; 8–9) – but that his followers must never be afraid to speak the truth of the gospel when given the opportunity to do so. This does not mean we must “proclaim Jesus” every time we speak to anyone, but that we must not fear the opinions or active discouragement of others when we do feel it is appropriate to speak (for more information on this, see the chapter on witnessing in our book *Getting Christianity Right*).

There is a great difference between flatly denying we know or are associated with Jesus (as the apostle Peter did, and yet was forgiven even that when he repented Luke 22:54–62; John 21:15–19), and simple reticence to speak out on occasion. This has been long understood by scholars of the Bible. For example, John Calvin made the point that the public acknowledgment of Jesus varies in boldness, fluency, wisdom, sensitivity and frequency, from believer to believer; and that it is the person who disowns Christ who is disowned, not the person whose witnessing may be somewhat feeble. Jesus encourages us not to fear, and to be strong when necessary, but he does not condemn those who may fail in this area.

No one is “worthy” of Christ when it comes to salvation, but that does not mean we should not strive to be worthy of him when it comes to the promises he offers us. Notice that just a few verses after Jesus stated the promise of Matthew 10:32–33 – and still in the same context – he said explicitly:

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their

cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 10:37–38)

This is because, although we can never be worthy of his salvation, we can become worthy to rule with Christ in his kingdom. This is plainly taught in many Bible verses, such as Matthew 7:21–23; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; Revelation 2:26; 3:4, 21. So it is, that acknowledging Christ – especially when persecution may be the result – is something that Jesus promises to reward.

This helps us to better understand the first part of Jesus’ promise: “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32). But the word “acknowledge” in this verse means so much more than simply “accept.” Jesus’ statement conveys the kind of acknowledgment that comes with an award or reward – just as we might say that an Olympic medal is an acknowledgment of a star athlete’s performance. It is similar to the word “recognition” in the title of this chapter – not recognition meaning we are aware of who someone is, but recognition in the sense of an award that acknowledges someone’s accomplishments.

The promise of Matthew 10:32-33 means that at the judgment seat of Christ, he will “recognize” or “acknowledge” before the Father those individuals who through their words and deeds acknowledged his rule in their lives. It will be a climactic moment in the history of salvation when Christ will be able to introduce and acknowledge those the Father called and gave to him (John 6:39) and who, with his help, became worthy of reward (Ephesians 6:8). So while this “I will” promise has little to do with our gaining salvation, it has everything to do with the reward of recognition God will give.

This is the great “awards ceremony” that awaits the faithful servants Jesus described in his parable of the pounds (Luke 19:12–26), and those whose work Paul described in his parable of the building materials (1 Corinthians 3:10–14). It is the setting of Jesus’ words “The one who is victorious will ... be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but

will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels” (Revelation 3:5). It is a transcendent promise indeed – an unshakable and sure promise given by the One “who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy” (Jude 1:24). This “I will” promise of Jesus was surely given for our consolation, hope, and lasting joy.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this book we have looked at the seven specific, unconditional, ongoing, and vitally important promises that Jesus made regarding his relationship with his followers. As we have looked at these promises we have seen how they apply to us in a progression through time – from when we first come to Christ, through his ongoing interaction with us in various aspects of our Christian lives, to the eternal future and reward we are promised to share with him.

In conclusion, consider just a few of the statements the Scriptures make regarding God’s promises. These statements are found in the contexts of other promises made by God, but what they tell us applies equally to the seven promises we have focused on in this book:

“He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:3–4)

“Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” (2 Corinthians 7:1)

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” (Hebrews 10:23)

“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.” (2 Corinthians 1:20)

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