Sunday, May 7, 1972
GOD'S PROMISES
Matthew 6:25-34

The Bible contains some astounding promises and state-ments ab. out God, His care for us, how He is involved in the world and with people and the power that is available to us in our day to day living. Perhaps we have heard some of these Biblical statements so often that we have not realized their meaning for us, or we have said, "Oh that was written in another age, such things don't apply to our day."

Listen to a few of these promises again! Think of their implications and how revolutionary our lives would be if began to live on the basis of them.

"Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he will strengthen you; wait, I say, on the Lord."

"The Lord is our keeper; the Lord shall preserve you from all evil; he shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth and even for evermore!"

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; ... but they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink. Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, and he who seeks, finds, and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

Truly, I say to you, if you have faith as large as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'move hence to yonder place and it will move, and nothing will be impossible to you.'

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. I am the light of the world, he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. In my father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and I will take you to myself that where I am you may be also.

Truly, Truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do: and greater works than these will he do. Whatsoever you ask in my name, I will do it."

The Apostle Paul wrote: “I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us. We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him. If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or dis-tress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? No, in all these things we are more than con-querors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

These are just a sample of some of the promises of our faith as recorded in the Bible. These and others are what make our faith the Good Mews!

But the question that is bothersome is — why do we have so much difficulty in believing and acting on these and other promises? If these promises and other in our faith are true, then it would seem that we would be the most joyful, free, and open people on earth. Also, it would seem that others hearing these promises of God for the first time would say — "I want God to be active in my life. I want to have the power and joy which Jesus promises to those who follow him.“

But it seems that at the same time we hear these promises and want to believe them and live as if they were true, there seems to be an opposite force working in us to keep us from giving ourselves over completely to God. We live as if these promises were not to be taken very seriously.

Let’s be personal for a moment. Has it not been your experience as it has been mine that you have to work at remembering such a simple thing as to pray each day? We are aware of God’s promises, and we may know from personal experience that when we keep in close communion with God, life has more meaning, we can handle our problems in a better way; life takes on an added quality and power. Yet knowing all of this. we still find ourselves subt1eyavoiding surrender to God, asking for his help and living on the basis of his promises.

Why is it that we refuse to let God help us? What holds us back from saying to God — here is my life, take it and use it. Why do we keep God at arm’s length or further?

Here are some of the reasons!

1. Most of us, really all of us, are pretty egotistical, self-reliant, independent individuals. We don’t like to admit that we need help from anyone, even God! We don’t like to admit to any kind of weakness or need. Call it pride, call it self-centeredness, call it self-centeredness, call it what you will; one of the hardest things in life is to admit deep down — “I need help!” To be able to say and mean it — “I cannot live this life on my own power. I cannot live this life adequately and dynamic-ally without God, or can I live it without the help and support of other people” is a difficult thing to do.

Let me be personal. I can come to my office in the morning, sit down at my desk and begin the day’s work. I know deep down that the best way to begin is with prayer, conversation with God, asking him to help me and guide me in doing his will during that day. It doesn’t take much time for that kind of prayer.

But then as I begin to do this, it's almost as if there is an opposite voice inside of me saying — "you've been doing pretty well yourself, why take the time to talk with God? Get to work! Have you had this kind of experience or something similar?"

This is one aspect of sin — the fact that we think we can live our lives without God or others. Oh, it's all right to have God around and to vaguely believe in him, but don't get too involved — keep your distance. In ef-fect we want to be our own god, or at least have a god we can manipulate and control according to our own de- sires and tastes. But deep down, we know that we cannot control the one true God. Isn't this part of the reason for our continual temptation to idolatry — the temptation to worship something less than God himself?

Yes, it's difficult to admit that we need help. Yet this admission is the first step to receiving God's power and living on the basis of his promises. It's that way with many things in life. The first step in the A.A. program is to admit that one needs help, that he cannot handle his problem alone.

I remember one alcoholic I knew many years ago in another town. He would come to see me regularly when he was drunk, and I was always kind and tried to help. But he would never admit deep down that he needed help. Over a period of several years, his wife divorced him, the bill collectors came after him, he lost his job and literally ended up in the gutter. It was only at this point that one day he stumbled into my office and said very simply and sincerely — "I need help!" Up to that point, he had been continually fooling himself by saying — "I can lick this problem by myself" or by saying, "I don't really have a problem." It was only after this admission that he began to work out his problems with the help of God and other people.

It's the same way with much of what happens in our lives. Sometimes a tragedy has to occur, or something devastating come along before we are willing to admit that we cannot live this life without God and others; before we begin to take the promises of God seriously.

In a book by Catherine Marshall, entitled, BEYOND OURSELVES, the author talks about this experience in her own life. She had always been aware of God's promises, but she said that she never really lived her life as if she believed them. It wasn't until she had tuberculosis and was hospitalized that she came to admit deep down that she couldn't live her life without God.

Here's how she described it — "Despair settled in. Often during those discouraging days there was a vivid picture in my mind. I was groping my way along a pitch-black tunnel. Finally, one day I realized that I had to turn the keys and the management of my life over to Christ. There I stood and took the plunge. It amounted to a quiet pledge to God, the promise of a blank check with my life. No visions, no choirs of angels, no saw-dust trail. I said in a simple prayer," 'From this moment I promise that I'll try to do whatever you tell me for the rest of my life, in so far as you'll make it clear to me what your wishes are. I'm weak and many times I'll probably want to renege on this. But Lord, you'll have to help me with that too.'" This, she says, was the turning point in her whole life. From then on she slowly died to her old life and was born again.

2. A second reason that we hesitate to live our lives on the basis of God's promises completely, is that we tell ourselves that we first want to settle everything intel-lectually in our own minds — the problem of miracles, what prayer really is and how it works, what God is like and more. We want to understand all of these things logically and rationally. Then we'll be ready to accept God's promises and live our lives on them.

What we forget is that in many other realms outside of religion, we don't always insist on completely under-standing everything before we act on it. I don't under-stand how atomic energy or electricity works. Arthur Compton, physicist, and Nobel Prize winner said to his Sunday school class one day — "Every great discovery I ever made, I gambled that the truth was there, and then I acted on it in faith until I could prove its existence"

3. A third reason we hesitate to make a surrender of our lives to God and accept his promises and live on that basis, is that we realize deep down that God wants all of us and will not be satisfied with anything less.

C.S. Lewis put it this way. "When I was a child, I often had a toothache, and I knew that if I went to my mother, she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get some sleep. But I did not go to my mother — at least until the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this. I did not doubt that she would give me the aspirin; but I knew that she would also do something else. I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more which I did not want. I wanted irrn11ediate relief from pain, but I could not get it without have my teeth permanently made right. I knew she would take me to the dentist, and I knew those dentists; once they started fiddling about with my teeth, they would soon be working on all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. They would not let sleeping dogs lie. If you gave them an inch, they took a mile.

And then Lewis went on to say — Our Lord is something like that. If you give him an inch, he'll take a mile. Dozens of people come to him to be helped with one particular sin which they are ashamed of. or which is obviously spoiling daily life; well, he will cure it all right, but he will not stop there. That may be all you asked, but if you once let God in, He will give you the full treatment. That is what all committed Christians have discovered.

These are some of the reasons we find ourselves holding back at times and not completely living on the basis of God's promises. There are undoubtedly more. Maybe you have your own.

But the Bible reminds us, and the lives of committed Christians make clear that when we commit ourselves to God and accept his promises, amazing and surprising things happen. Through nineteen centuries of Christian history there is a luminous trail of broken lives that were renewed; of human relations that were redeemed; of hate transformed into love; of despair changed into hope; of mourning turned into joy. I think of one person who when asked whether he actually believed that Jesus changed water into wine, replied: "Well, I don't know about that, but I know that he has changed beer into furniture in my home."

The promises of God are true and there is power when we believe in them and act on them, even though we try to avoid God and to live without him.

Here God, take us and use us. Take our lives, all of them. From this moment we promise that we'll try to do whatever you tell us for the rest of our lives. We're weak and many times we'll probably want to renege on this, but Lord, you'll have to help us with that too. Amen.