

THE GOD PROMISES



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The following is a transcription of Pastor Melissa Scott's teaching on the Promises of God as she preached it live from the Los Angeles University Cathedral.

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I'm guilty of assuming that everyone knows what Faith is. If you ask people why or what they believe, you will encounter a lot of people that have not learned the basic principles of Christian Faith. For that matter, if you went into their homes and could ask them "What is Faith? Define Faith for me," you would probably not get a complete answer.

I confess I love digging into God's Word and pulling it apart. I love grammar, I love history, I love God's Word. Today you will hear a basic Faith message.

Let me start with this. We read in the book of Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas are praying. They're in prison, praying and singing to God at midnight. Now my guess is that at any given time you could read that passage and not

focus in on the same word that I'm going to focus on right now. Midnight. At midnight, in a dark cell, probably rat-infested, at midnight. In your life whatever your midnight is—and it can last a minute, it can last an hour, it can last who knows how long.... What I love about Paul is that if we look and analyze his Faith, you will never see it waver. His Faith is always at the same level. "I've learned in whatsoever state I'm in..." a solid not-moving expression of a state of being. That prompted me to think, from my vantage point, that most people have equated Faith with some emotive hope. When things come, when trouble comes, when tribulation comes, when your midnight comes, do you get pushed around? You may have faith in faith, or faith in something else, but Faith in God and what He said is what we are going to talk about.

There are many expressions of Faith in the Bible. There are people in the Bible that you'll encounter, particularly in the Old Testament, who have little or no Faith, for example, Gideon and his vocabulary of doubt. Moses didn't lack Faith. He just said "What am I going to say?" When God called him, he said "Who am I? What am I going to say? What am I going to tell the people?" I don't believe it was a lack of Faith. Remember this is the man that lived in the palaces of Egypt and left them to follow God. That took courage, and courage is a large part of Faith.

We always go back to these basic principles. "Without faith it's impossible to please God" and there's got to be a Faith element in the whole equation. We have been taught Faith is an action. These are the ABC's of Faith: 'Action, based upon belief, sustained by confidence.' It's not based on emotion. People tend to equate Faith with 'I hope' and hope can be crushed, Faith cannot. I'm going to use a picture analogy, "The stone that the builders rejected," your Faith should be as solid as that. The disciples prayed "Increase our faith." That can be our prayer as we grow and study and hear, Faith comes by hearing God's Word. If your Faith increases and increases and then somehow your Faith is on the decline like the Stock Market, you've got something wrong with where you're investing your Faith. I can tell you it's not in God and His Word. For He is God and changes not.

We were reading in Revelation, Jesus is in the midst of the Churches. Now I want you to follow my line of thinking. Jesus is in the midst of the Churches and yet—the letter being sent to the seven Churches in Asia, which is the universal Church, which is the Church through history, through time—yet evil still crept into the Church with Jesus in the midst. I want you to think about that because a lot of people will say "Well, a House of God should never have that." Well, go back to the Garden, that's the original House of God. Satan still found a way in there. That's why we have the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, not only applying to you and me in the world but underneath the canopy of the Church. It says 'Leave it to grow there until harvest time. The wheat I'll put in my barn; the tares will be burnt up, but leave it there until then.'

There are places in God's Book where Faith can't work until He activates it. Let me explain. Read Philemon, in the letter written by Paul to Philemon you'll read something that probably most of us—including myself until I read it, really read it—overlooked. Onesimus stole something from his master, Philemon, and ran away. Philemon's house was an ekklesia, it was a Church and under his master's roof where Onesimus lived, where he served, he couldn't be saved. He stole something and he ran away. Divine providence, believe it or not, made him run to where Paul was—in prison. I don't know how Onesimus heard Paul, but he heard the Gospel preached by Paul and he was saved. It couldn't happen in his own household where he lived and served but it happened there.

There is a funny thing in that passage, if you read it closely, Paul says to Philemon 'whatever he stole, it's an IOU, I'll make good on it.' He also says 'I don't see how it could be an IOU,' because if you look closely you'll see Philemon was a convert of Paul. So in essence he's saying 'I don't know how it could be an IOU because basically you're indebted to me.' By the way, Paul subsequently says to Philemon 'He's profitable for me now. Take him back and don't take him back as a slave, take him back as though you are receiving me.'

We are very much like Onesimus this way. We are slaves to the flesh, we are slaves to the world, but if we can run away and get to the place where we can really hear the Gospel being preached, God's Word and not some gimmickry, there's hope. I'm tired of hearing people talking about seed faith and about the prosperity doctrine. Do you remember the phrase "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country"? How many remember that? Show me your hands. If we put that to God it would be "Ask not what you can do for God, but what God can do for you." That's the society we live in. Instead of being servants of the Living God, we want the Living God to be our servant.

We owe a debt to our Lord and Savior we can never repay, the good news of Jesus Christ. What more did the first Church need? What more do we need? Just preach the Gospel. Just Faith, and "Faith" as the song says "in the promises." That's what I wanted to come talk about today, Faith in the promises.

When it comes to the promises of God, some want to reach into the promises of God like reaching in for a tissue out of a box. The Bible says "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen," in Christ, II Corinthians 1:20. Some people go to the promises and there's an element missing. This is why the world out there is preaching to reach in and grab for a promise, they are reaching for a promise without Christ. For you who have been taught in the Word, you know 'Christ is formed in your heart by faith.' How do you get 'in Christ'? By hearing the Word of God. It's always the circle that comes back to the same place, but how do you know if you're not taught?

So I come back to the beginning, I assume that most people know the starting point of our Faith is Christ—preach Christ. Okay, Christ walked the earth, made these claims about Himself, said He would raise on the third day and He did. So guess what? I'm more interested in what He said and what He did, and that He made good on them.

Now I go back to the promises, what He said and what He's going to do. And why the promises of God? The promises of God are given to us, for us to ask intelligently for God's will. Like a Last Will and Testament, God sat down, to be ludicrous, and He wrote these promises out as His Will, "I'll leave this to my children. Aside from Jesus Christ, which is the first thing I gift to you, the rest of these things I write down as a Will" that, for example, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be."

There are those who will take a promise and twist it "As thy day, so shall thy faith be." No. "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." I really have come to terms with this. You can wake up in the morning and not feel your best. It shouldn't affect your Faith. Your Faith should still be strong even though your body feels weak. You go back to the same principle "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

I still live in the same flesh that I lived in when I didn't know or understand anything about God. I haven't received new skin (flesh). But I am a new creature in Christ Jesus. By His power I am made whole and He has washed my sins away. That brings us to Romans 7:15, "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." Maybe I will help somebody get delivered from the doctrine of 'perfectionism.' I'm still a sinner being saved by God's Grace and I'm not afraid to admit it. Thank God for I Corinthians 15:54 where it says until "this mortal shall put on immortality." No one wants to read that because they want it 'Zap'—right now. Until "this mortal puts on immortality," that tells you it's not going to happen here. I am a work in progress.

The promise of God "As thy day, so shall thy strength be." That's a wonderful promise for us because you know there are days, and today was one of them, I just felt miserable this morning. I really felt bad, but by Faith I'm here. "The steps of a good man or woman are ordered by the LORD." So what happens when you fall? Well, I know you've all been taught 'Get up and point in the right direction.' But if "the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD" and you take a fall, what then? These are all the principles we've been taught. We can go back to Isaiah 50 and say don't doubt in the dark what God showed you in the light, "Trust in the name of the LORD."

Some make the mistake of trying to define Faith by Hebrews 11:1. You read Hebrews 11:1, what does it say? "Faith is," what? "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" but it does not define Faith. And, paradoxically, if you're going to grab a promise, Faith transubstantiates the promise.

I'm going to use an analogy of something and then I'm going to get to my message. Jesus said 'Except ye become like children,' you'll read the passage in Mark 10:15. Then you read Paul in Ephesians 4:14 saying 'Be no more like children, tossed with the doctrine to and fro.' They're not contradicting each other. Jesus says 'Except you be like children,' 'hear the voice of your Father, listen and obey.' Paul is saying 'once you come to know that voice, quit running around for some other doctrine.' That is like a child looking for different toys to play with. Once you know where you're going, quit looking for something else. Listen to the voice of the Sayer, grab hold of it, that's that! That's what Ephesians 4:14 is saying.

Now I came up with an analogy because I see people wrestle with this all the time. We are like children on a playground. You climb up the monkey bars and you go across and you go back down. You watch kids play on the playground—there are some kids that will get up on those monkey bars and they really are like monkeys. They just swing right across, they skip a couple of the rungs, right? They're to the other side and zip they're down. Other kids will climb up there and they have to grasp rung by rung right across—grasp each one of them with a tight grip. Then you've got kids, and I could tell you I was one of them, that couldn't make it half way across and had to fall down in the middle. We think there are levels of Faith. It is true, you can have levels of Faith, but Faith fixed in the right place begins to grow like a seed planted in good soil that takes root.

Now imagine God from a bird's-eye view looking down at these children, taking the analogy of the children with

the Faith element involved. You have from God's perspective the child that can't make it across. "I just need to ask for more strength," in this case more Faith. The disciples asked for that. Do you think that after the Day of Pentecost, after that day when the Spirit was poured out, that they went and asked for more Faith? They were endued with power from on high and they went out and preached the Word. I highly doubt if you look at these "sent ones" as an example, that any one of them wavered afterwards.

At the beginning, before they were endued, when they were with Jesus...look at Peter, that's all you need to see—a little bit of doubt here, and a little bit of denial here, and off we go. The Day of Pentecost he's 'Mr. Pentecost;' he stands up to preach the message boldly.

Sometimes I'm grieved in my spirit because I know if people understood the real battle—the devil is a copycat. Some try to get you to take your eyes off Jesus and examine yourself. With the focus being taken off Jesus, of course the devil tricks you into seeing if you're worthy. It's a trick! Maybe you'll begin to see who is planting the seeds of doubt in your life. God's not the author of fear or doubt.

You look in your Strong's Concordance under 'faith' and you'll find, strangely enough, in the Old Testament there are only two references, two Scriptural references that use our English word faith in the Old Testament. The rest of them are all in the New Testament. It's staggering. In Hebrew, you've got the three words which we've become familiar with: batach, 'to lean on a staff;' hasa, 'to run to a shelter;' and amen, which is pretty much self explanatory. These three Hebrew words encompass the Greek word pisteo. It's too bad we don't have a verb 'faither,' or 'faithing,' because that's what it should be. It's an action word.

Everything points back to rock-solid Faith and I always ask myself the question "Why do people waver so much?" I'm not talking about little bits, I'm talking about one day we're up and the next day we're down. I'm not talking about emotions because I think most people have this confused. Faith and your emotions are not the same, they're not synonymous. Faith is based on a fact starting with the Resurrection. Now how can you slide around that? How can your Faith become less? Are you less sure today than you were a year ago about Jesus Christ's Resurrecting? Absolutely not! Then why would your Faith move? Now I'm not talking about being a stoic. A stoic is more than "I shall not be, I shall not be moved" (like the song), it's more like "I refuse to let anybody see me cry, blink, or smile." I'm not talking about that.

I'm talking about Faith. Read about Paul in the New Testament. He's in prison, he's in a cell, he's shipwrecked, he's beaten, he's being tried, and yet he's still Paul full of Faith. He doesn't have anything other than the fact that he's been converted, his Damascus road experience, and the element that makes him go out and proclaim the Word with certainty and confidence—the power of Jesus Christ. There's a good definition of Faith right there.

This is like a spiritual blast, every once in a while we need to come back to the basics. Go back to God's promises, they're yours, they're mine. I had a good laugh when I was thinking about these children on the playground. I thought of one of the promises, "Shoes of iron and brass." I got to thinking about it, you know God's a funny fashion designer. Shoes of iron and brass wouldn't cut it in this day and age. But there's something about what He says, we know 'tough shoes for a tough trip,' but if you think about it, to give us shoes like that it's going to be tough. Not only do you have to make the trip but you've got to drag these things around.

What I like about God's Book is that the Bible confirms itself. That's why we read in Ephesians 6 'Your feet shod with the gospel of peace,' same equipping if you will, same mindset, same everything—we're on a journey. Now I take that, "Shoes of iron and brass," and go back to the playground and imagine now you're a kid swinging across those monkey bars. What a terrible analogy for some of us grown-ups wearing their shoes of iron and brass going across those monkey bars. Guaranteed you're going to fall, there's just a guarantee, the weight alone is going to probably kill you when you fall. But when you fall, and I'm trying to be funny and satirical, but the fact of the matter is when you fall, and we all do, Romans 3:23 says "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

I keep my prayer, "More of you God, and less of me until I reach over there." But if you're like me swinging across those monkey bars and plummeting to the ground with your shoes of iron and brass, this message is for you. Turn with me if you will to Deuteronomy 33:27. That was all background to get to here. Now I have to tell you while you're turning and spinning, I am the most blessed person because those messages, what we've called Nitro Pill messages, I read them, I listen to them and it's daily food for me. What I love about the Bible, the Bible is like a spring or well. If your soul's thirsty it never runs dry; it's always there to replenish and refresh.

I've put the King James text on the board. Let's read what it says: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and

underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. Israel then shall dwell in safety alone."

The French translation reads C'est une retraite que Le Dieu qui est de tout tem(p)s, it's 'a retreat that the God who is of all times,' et que d'être sous les bras, 'and to be underneath His arms,' eternal car il a chassé de devant toi, 'He's chased away from before you your enemies,' tes ennemis, et il a dit exterminer, I'm sure everybody can read that. You don't have to read French to know what that says, 'exterminate,' 'exterminator,' like terminator; exterminate. Israel donc habitera seul surement, 'Israel will live alone surely.'

The Spanish translation reads Su morada en Lo Alto y acá baxo sus brazos eternos arrojará de tu presencia al enemigo y dira, Quedate desmenuzado. Habitará Israel confiadamente, y solo, basically saying the same thing, 'underneath the everlasting arms,' but here it says Lo Alto, 'of the High,' certainly meaning 'of the Most High,' but it's saying 'of the High' and there 'underneath, the arms eternal.' You've got the same sentence being said with the contrast with 'the Most High' and 'bottomless arms.'

"The eternal God is thy refuge," there's another translation that reads 'as your dwelling place,' "and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee." There are two words being used differently: 'dwell' and 'refuge.'

The Greek Septuagint reads kai skepasei se Theou arche, 'the God,' genitive, 'of the beginning,' kai hupo ischun, 'underneath,' and I love what the Greek does, 'underneath the strong,' brachionon, 'underneath the strong arms everlasting.' I like that, 'strong arms everlasting.' I didn't do that, the Septuagint did it, kai ekbalei; ek, meaning 'out,' balei, 'to throw out;' apo prosopou, 'from your face.' God's got you covered.

When we get to the Hebrew, the first word reads me'ownah. Your King James translates it 'refuge.' I want to point out the difference between 'refuge,' me'ownah; the word toward the end of the verse, vayashakan, being translated 'to dwell;' and vayamishkan, which translates 'to tabernacle.'

Me'ownah Elohi, 'God,' notice when we normally read, we read Elohiym, this is Elohi, there's no 'm,' there's no plural, it's the singular. Elohi qedem, 'God of the front,' you may have your Bible already noted the 'God of the forefront.'

Zerowath, if you remember in Isaiah 53 we read "to whom the arm of the LORD is revealed," zerowa, from the word oze which has a military use and connotation. 'The arm of force,' so the Septuagint wasn't too far off in using ischun in its translation 'strong arm,' 'strength.'

"Underneath bottomless," olam which is being translated 'bottomless,' 'endless.' How far is bottomless? I have no idea, but you'll know when you're falling...it's going to be far down. To me it also means however far I fall, He's going to be there. I remember the first time I heard my husband speak on this passage and the first time I heard it I said "You know," forgive me, "but it reminds me of Superman." Remember how Superman managed to always be around and had a place to change? He always knew where Lois Lane was and every time she found herself in a bind he would catch her. I know that's a comic book hero, but the God we serve is real and He really does see us right where we're at.

We can fall into the trap where we think our deliverance will be a certain way; when God comes in on the scene, it may not be the way we thought God would deliver us. Our ways and God's ways are not the same. He comes in to deliver, He comes in to catch, He comes in on the spot but it might be different than what we thought.

Back to the Hebrew text, garesh, this word is the translation of our English 'to throw out.' 'To thrust out' is used in Genesis when Adam and Eve were ushered out of the Garden.

"Underneath are the everlasting arms," just to go right out of the King James, but when it says "Israel then shall dwell in safety alone" really it should read 'tabernacle.' Once God is done kicking out the enemy from before your face, the 'tabernacle,' the 'tabernacling' means the presence of God is going to be with you. This is a promise we can take and make it our own. Wherever you are, if you're looking at the circumstance remember Faith looks beyond the circumstance. Faith looks beyond reason and steps over everything. When you're at the point that your 'habitation,' where you 'live,' starts to be this tabernacle not made with hands because God's Spirit is already living in you, you can then say "This is where I live. I live in Christ. He lives in me and underneath are His powerful everlasting arms. I'm safe."

Go to the New Testament passage that we know all too well, Matthew 14:27. "Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good 'courage'...And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship" (if there's one place

you should underline in your Bible it's this one), "he walked on the water...But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand," His arm, "and caught him, and said, 'why did you double-think?'" I want you to connect the dots because sometimes you can grab a promise in the Old Testament and fail to see that God repeats Himself in many diverse ways through the Bible.

Let me tell you the two things it says. When Peter says "If it's you, Lord, bid me come," He bids all of us to come to Him, and then when we start making the trip and things get a little rough, "Oh my God! Lord, save me."

"Okay, it's okay" and they walk back, and I'm sure they both walked back on the water. He bids each one of us, and when we get out there we think it's going to be a cakewalk and then suddenly it's a lot tougher than we thought and instead of doing the things we know, we begin to revert back to leaning on the arm of the flesh and take our eyes off Jesus. Stay focused on Him!

'Underneath the everlasting strong arms,' here you can be sure of one thing. He might have told you to come, and now you're following and you can't believe how hard the trip is, but don't worry. Underneath His everlasting arms, those strong arms, He's there and He's not going to let you fall. That's part of our Faith. Faith says "You know what? I'm never going to know what it's like until in the midst of it all, having done all, I stand on His promises." God sees Faith like that and honors it. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus-that's Faith.

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