

GREAT AND PRECIOUS PROMISES

2 Peter 1:1-4

Intro: James Packer in his book, *Knowing God*, says that God, in His Word, has presented the truth to us in three forms. I am not going to use the same words that he used to describe the three forms, but what I am saying is essentially the same.

The first form of truth God gives us by way of instruction. When we open our Bibles, the first thing that we read is, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” This is instruction; it is teaching. It is a statement of truth, the truth of God. Any reasonably intelligent person would know that “the heaven and the earth” could not just have happened. Someone had to do it, and since man is not capable of such a work, it makes sense to believe that God did it.

It not only tells us how the heaven and the earth came into existence, but it teaches us that God had to exist before there was a heaven or earth, and so we speak of His pre-existence. And for Him to have been able to create the heaven and the earth, we must recognize also that God had to be extremely wise and extremely powerful to have been able to do what He did.

And then when we examine the word “God” as it appears in the Hebrew text, we have in the word Elohim the suggestion that there was more than One Person involved in creation. We are not surprised then when we go on to verse 2 to read that “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” This prepares us for the study of theology, the teaching about God.

And so when we get into the NT and the Gospel of John it does not surprise us to read that there was a Person called “the Word” in the beginning with God, a Person distinct from God, and yet Who was God. And further we are not surprised to read in John 1:3:

All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.

Now I have given you all of this to illustrate that the Bible gives us a lot of wonderful teaching, things that we would not know if God had not seen fit to reveal them to us in His Word. These are things that God wants us to understand. Furthermore, He wants us to believe the teaching

because God does not lie. His Word is true and it is the truth. And so we are to read it and believe all of the teaching, or instruction, that we find in the Word.

In one sense, it is all teaching. The next two forms that I am going to point out are also teaching, but they are teaching of such a unique kind and of such great importance, that we believe that they need to be mentioned separately. But much of the Bible is strictly informational, and we need to recognize this.

But there is a second form which we can call, commandments. These are words that are directed to people which God wants us to do, or not to do, as the case may be.

Going back to the first chapter of Genesis we have an illustration of the many commandments that we find in the Word of God. The Spirit of God has let us in on a conversation which was conducted by the Members of the Godhead regarding the creation of man. Man was to be made in the image and likeness of God, and he was to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth” (Gen. 1:26). This is still instruction. But it leads to what I want to point out as this second form of truth that we have in the Word. The verse is Gen. 1:28:

28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

This is the first of many commandments that we find in the Word of God. It is a positive commandment, that is, it tells us what Adam and Eve were to do.

As we go on into chapter 2 we find a second commandment, only this is a negative commandment, that is, primarily what they were not to do. Cf. Gen. 2:16-17:

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

This seems to combine all three forms of teaching that we find in the

Bible. Verse 16 is informational. Verse 17, the first part, is a negative command. They were not to eat “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” The last statement of verse 17 was a promise, the kind of a promise that is a warning. God promised them that if they ate of that particular tree, they would die!

We all know what happened. Satan came and tempted Eve to eat the fruit that God had told them not to eat, she ate it, and gave to her husband, and he ate it, *and they died!* They died spiritually. They were doomed to die physically, and they were under the judgment of God to die eternally! This is where all of our troubles got started.

But let me give you a better illustration of a promise, this third form of truth that we find in the Bible.

In chapter 3 of Genesis where the Lord pronounced judgment on Satan, and then on Eve, and finally on Adam, this is what He said to Satan who had appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent:

15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).

This is the first promise of salvation. It is what we might call the promise of all promises, the greatest of the promises. We have this first “I will” of God. We know now that the seed of the woman, not of a man, would be our Lord Jesus Christ, Who was born of the virgin Mary. And would by His death defeat Satan and provide salvation for all of the people of God. Sometimes there are conditions which God gave to His promises, but there were no conditions attached to this promise. This is what God promised to do, and we know now that He did it. God intervened to secure the salvation of all whom He would save.

We can really say that the Bible traces from Genesis to Revelation the fulfillment of that first promise which God made when He passed judgment on the Devil. We have salvation today because of that promise.

And so the Bible is made up of teaching, truth that the Lord wants us to know, commandments that He has given from time to time throughout the Bible, and His many, many promises.

Now let me distinguish between them. All truth is for us to know and to believe. Commandments are what God wants us to do, or not do. And

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this can change, and did change through the various dispensations of time. But promises are what God has said He would do. We believe the truth. We are to obey the commandments. But we trust God's promises. We can truly praise God if we can sing from the heart that we are *standing on the promises of God!*

We must read our Bibles to learn the truth. We must read our Bibles so that we will know how the Lord wants us to live. And we must read our Bibles to find out what He has promised to do for us in our lives day by day. And it is good to pay attention to all three of these. In fact, there is nothing more important for us to do when we read our Bibles.

Notice how Paul combined all three of these in the opening verses of his letter to Titus:

- 1 Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness;
- 2 In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;
- 3 But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour (Titus 1:1-3).

To show how concerned the Lord is that we believe His promises, the writer of Hebrews has given us a very important passage in Hebrews, chapter 6, beginning with verse 9. Paul (or whoever the writer was, I believe it was Paul) had just been dealing with those Hebrew believers to whom He was writing about their prolonged spiritual infancy, and how it was not possible for a true believer to lose his salvation. And to assure them that he was not questioning their salvation, he wrote these words which I want to read to you. (Read Heb. 6:9-20, noticing vv. 12, 13, 15, and 17.)

Now I want to take you to the last chapter of 2 Peter to show you how the enemy focuses his attacks on the promises of Scripture, the promises of God. (Read 2 Pet. 3:1-14, noting the reference to the promises of God in vv. 4, 9, and 13.) An attack on the promises of God is an attack on God. Our salvation rests solely upon the faithfulness of God's promises.

I have given you this extended background on what we find in the Word of God to get you thinking about these three forms of teaching that we

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have in the Word of God. There is much for us to learn, much for us to do, and much for us to believe.

Now what I am about to say about the epistles of Peter, I could say with equal force about Paul's epistles, about John's epistles, about the epistle of James, and the epistle to Jude. And it is this: All of these men were greatly concerned about the spiritual lives of the people to whom they were writing. And that is what is apparent in the epistles of Peter. Peter knew how easy it is to talk right, but not to walk right. I don't know if that is really good English, but you get what I mean. And we all have that problem. And Peter would have us know that our failure as Christians is to a great extent traceable to the fact that we don't pay enough attention to the promises of God. We don't pay enough attention to what God says He will do for us because we are so concerned about what we are to do for God. I don't mean by this that we should ignore the commandments of Scripture. If anything, we need to pay more attention to them. But I am saying that we need to pay more attention to God's promises. We need to learn that we can't obey the commandments of the Lord without His help, but, if we know what a promise is, we shouldn't need to be told that the fulfillment of the promises are wholly dependent upon the Lord. *This is what makes these opening verses of 2 Peter so unique and so important! Peter said here that it is by God's "exceeding great and precious promises" that we are made "partakers of the divine nature." Isn't that what these verses at the beginning of this epistle are saying?* There is no question about it. All that Peter has to say in these verses has to do with what we have received from God and our Lord Jesus Christ. In salvation from start to finish, God gives and we receive. God promises, and we, by His grace, believe. He commands us, and we, again by His grace, do what He says. And all the time we keep learning more and more.

Peter liked the word "precious." He used it twice here in 2 Peter: in verse 1, and again in v. 4. But in 1 Peter he used it five times: 1:7 and 19; 2:4, 6, 7. What do we mean when we think of something as precious? We mean that it is very valuable to us. Sometimes, as here in the epistles of Peter, it means *one of a kind, not available anywhere else, very rare.*