

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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**Broadcast Date:** 26 January 2003

**No.** T0250

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## Promises of Jesus: The Promise of His Pardon

In these next four talks, God willing, we are going to look at some of the promises of the Lord Jesus. We shall look at four: the promise of His pardon; the promise of His power; the promise of His peace; and, finally, the promise of His presence.

When we were children, we would sometimes make promises. If the promise was to a good friend, it would usually be followed by the words, 'cross my heart' or some such expression. That meant that we were in deadly earnest! Sadly, even such well-meant promises were occasionally broken, perhaps through a change of friendship or, more likely, because we simply were unable to keep the promise.

At the outset of these talks, it's good to remind ourselves that the promises of Jesus are totally different! They are promises that will always be kept. After all, He is the Truth, as He said to His disciple, Thomas, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). No false word ever passed His lips. So Paul writes to Titus, "...eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised..." (1:2) The promises of Jesus, then, are absolutely certain. They are promises to live by; they are promises to die by.

Today, we are going to look at the promise of His pardon. That God is a pardoning God is touched on occasionally in the Old Testament. So in Nehemiah's day, the people could declare, "But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness" (Nehemiah 9:17). Isaiah can also write, "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (55:6-7). Finally, the prophet Micah can exclaim, "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity?" (7:18). The marvellous truth that our God is, indeed, a pardoning God bursts out throughout the New Testament, and particularly in the words of Jesus. So to the promise of His pardon. We will read the words of Jesus from John 5:24-25: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, 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." Some 25 times in John's Gospel, Jesus precedes His especially important statements by the words, 'Verily, verily' as in our Authorised Version. The words literally mean 'Amen, Amen' and have been translated 'Truly, truly', or 'Most assuredly,' or 'I tell you the truth'. In this way, the Lord Jesus would have us in no doubt whatever as to the truth and dependability of His words.

The condemned man on death row has only one need – that of pardon. So, too, each one of us, old or young, rich or poor, so-called 'good' or so-called 'bad', equally stand in need of pardon from God. For the Bible makes our condition before God abundantly plain: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And the consequence, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

But we note that in this promise of Jesus, He speaks of "has crossed over from death to life". There can be no better news, no better promise. We need, however, to note the conditions Jesus sets: firstly, "whoever hears My word". What could be simpler?! Every time we read the Gospels, we can hear the words of Jesus, if only we will listen to Him. Secondly, He adds, "and believes Him who sent Me". Do we believe that God sent His Son, Jesus, to die on Calvary's cross as the Substitute for our sins? After all, at Christmas time we were remembering the words of the angel to Joseph, "You are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). So Jesus could say to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

There are only the two conditions: to hear and to believe. Jesus promises that each one who fulfils these conditions "has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life". Jesus here promises eternal life as a present possession – "has eternal life". I have it now just as assuredly one day I will enjoy it in heaven, although in a fuller way then. I can be absolutely sure of it now! Note also that Jesus goes on to say, "...he has passed from death to life". I do not have to wait till I die to know whether I am good enough for heaven. The death of Jesus makes me good enough! I have already passed from death to life! So that when the time comes for my earthly life to end, I know that the result will be to "depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Philippians 1:23).

We need, however, to remember the challenging parable which Jesus told concerning the rich man and the beggar. When they died, the beggar, Lazarus, went to Abraham's bosom, a picture of heaven, but the rich man to Hades. Being in torment, the rich man cried out for relief but heard, instead, the solemn message from Abraham, "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us" (Luke 16:19-31). 'A great gulf fixed' – only in this life can we avail ourselves of the free pardon – of that step from death to life - which the Lord Jesus offers!

But Jesus goes on to add, "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". That time had indeed come when, towards the end of His ministry, Jesus stood before the opened cave where the dead body of His friend, Lazarus (not the Lazarus of the parable), had lain for four days. Then Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth". Lazarus came out, "bound hand and foot with grave clothes". Jesus said to those around, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:1-44). Dead Lazarus heard, and could not but respond to the mighty voice of the Son of God!

But in a spiritual sense, too, the whole of the ministry of Jesus was a time when the dead, the spiritually dead, heard the voice of Jesus and, through faith, received His gift of eternal life. So today, we who are spiritually dead, "dead in trespasses and sins" as Ephesians 2:1 describes us, can still hear that same voice of Jesus and live.

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are still waiting to hear His voice, literally. Paul describes that time when the Lord Jesus will come to take His own to be with Him in heaven in these words, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

The hymn writer, J Swain, captures something of the joy of that day for us:

*And God has fixed the happy day,  
When the last tear shall dim our eyes;  
When He will wipe these tears away,  
And fill our hearts with glad surprise;  
To hear His voice, and see His face,  
And know the fullness of His grace!*

Oh, to hear His summoning shout!

If the verses we have read in John 5:24 and 25 give us the promise of Jesus' pardon, then in John 10:27-30, we have the assurance which flows from that pardon. We'll read the verses: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."

John 10 is the chapter of the Shepherd. So Jesus describes Himself, "I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (verse 11). The assurance Jesus gives is to those who have come to know Him as the Shepherd in this way. We'll look at this assurance clause by clause.

**"My sheep hear My voice"** We have already seen that hearing the words of Jesus is a necessary condition to having eternal life, to crossing over from death to life. But day by day we need to continue to hear His voice. He speaks to us as we read His word, the Bible, and as we speak to Him in prayer.

**"...and I know them"** It's good to know that He knows me through and through, the good and the bad, and He loves me just the same! I am so precious to Him – I cost Him His life at Calvary.

**"...and they follow Me"** His sheep do not go their own way; they follow Him. Having eternal life and the assurance of it is not a licence for selfish, careless living. Rather it is the motive for obedience to Him, going His way. So Paul writes, "He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

**"And I give them eternal life"** Note, "I give"; not "I will give" in the future. Eternal life is His free gift to those who trust in Him. It is theirs as a present possession, here and now. So the apostle John draws his first letter to a close with the words, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

**“...and they shall never perish.”** No sheep of His will ever be lost! Having trusted Christ as His Saviour, the believer is totally and eternally secure in Him. These words of Jesus establish that fact beyond any doubt. The construction of the words in the original Greek is interesting. Essentially it is a double negative followed by ‘for ever’. At school, we were always taught that a double negative is a positive. But not here! The words might be translated, “by no means ever”. In this way, the Lord Jesus would assure all who belong to Him of their eternal security.

**“...neither shall any anyone snatch them out of My hand”** These words again emphasise the impossibility of a single sheep of His being lost. Each of His sheep is totally secure in His hands, those nail-pierced hands of Calvary.

The story is told of a boy who carefully and lovingly made a wooden boat. He looked forward to the day when he would be able to sail it on holiday at the seaside. On the first day of the holidays, he couldn't wait to get down to the sea. How beautifully it sailed along! How proud he was of his boat! But then, suddenly, the wind changed direction and, on an ebbing tide, the boat was carried out to sea. The boy was so upset – the holiday was ruined! But one day, towards the end of the holiday, the boy was passing a second-hand shop and there, in the middle of the window, was his boat. Sometime later, an incoming tide had washed it back on shore where it had been found and sold. The boy went into the shop but it was little use telling the owner that it was his boat. There was a price on it now and the boy had just enough pocket money left to buy it back. As he left the shop, with his boat tucked securely under his arm, he was heard to say to his boat, “Now you're mine. You're doubly mine. You're mine because I made you; and you're mine because I bought you.” The next time the boy took his boat down to the sea, there was a good strong string securely attached to the boat and firmly grasped in the boy's hand! Whatever the wind or the tide, that boat was totally secure! Each one of His sheep was too dearly bought by the Lord Jesus at Calvary for Him ever to lose one of them.

Some Christians have considerable difficulty in being sure of their salvation. They fear that one day they may lose it. Their fears are based on some words of Jesus in Matthew 24:13: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved”. But, taken in context, these words look on to a time after the Church has been taken to heaven to be with the Lord Jesus. There will then follow a time of terrible persecution for the Jews, known as the Tribulation. These words of Jesus refer to that time and have nothing to do with the eternal security of believers today.

The Lord Jesus goes on in John 10 to give an additional reason for the security of His sheep: “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand” (verse 29). Each of the sheep is a special love gift of the Father to His Son. So in John 17, in that prayer of the Lord Jesus to His Father just before the cross, seven times over He describes His disciples as “those whom Thou hast given Me”. As having been given by the Father to His Son, and as bought by the Lord Jesus at Calvary, we are so very precious – far too precious to be lost! We are in the Shepherd's hand and in the Father's hand! Could there be greater security?!

In verse 30, the Lord Jesus adds, “I and My Father are one”. These words, I believe, are more than a statement of the essential unity of being of Father and Son, though that fact is clearly in the words. They also indicate an essential unity of purpose. That unity of purpose was clearly seen in the Lord's life, and especially in the Lord's words to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). But that purpose is also seen today in this joint work of maintaining each believer securely to the end.

Let us rejoice in God's free pardon and in His gift of eternal life as a present possession, never to be lost. But let the possession of it move us the more to live here for His glory and praise!

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