

Hebrews 13:1-6

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[0:00] Well, thank you. These are wonderful songs to sing that focus our minds and our hearts on! The wonderful promise of God. The title for today's message, I will stand on every promise! That's a perfect title. I had as a title, Did You Hear the Promise? That's our theme. So, we're looking at the marvelous promise of God. I hope you'll have your Bible open at Hebrews and chapter 13, and I want to focus your attention particularly on verse 5, where we read these words, keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. I have a distant relative who served for some years as a pastor in a rural part of Cambridgeshire. We're talking about the 1960s.

A young married man at that time served very faithfully, and I have to say sacrificially, was a rural congregation. He was paid a pittance, barely could live on it. It was the kind of environment where farmers who were a large part of the congregation would leave vegetables at his door in order to support him and his wife. He served very faithfully for a good number of years.

Children came along. That ministry could not sustain the family. He went into some other work, and some years later, his wife died very early in life. It was devastating for him.

When Karen and I were fairly newly married, we were living in London, we had him over on a number of occasions to our home for a meal. On one occasion, I'll never forget it, it just dropped out in conversation that he was no longer going to church. I couldn't believe it. I mean, having served so faithfully, so sacrificially, I said to him, something's happened here. What is it that has gone wrong? And I will never forget what he said, and perhaps even more the way he said it.

He thumped his fist, the palm of his hand, and he said, what we've got to do, what we've got to do, what we've got to do, every Sunday, I just couldn't stand it any longer.

[2:53] Now, he had clearly gone to a church that was very, very different from this one, where you are blessed together with the promises of God and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ held up every week in a way that is life-giving for you. But you get the sense of what he had experienced.

He had experienced an environment in which the message seemed to bring nothing but one demand on top of another. This is what you've got to be. This is what you've got to do. And here's this man who's in a very vulnerable state of life, having experienced a great deal of loss, and rather than building him up, he found himself crushed by what he was hearing on a Sunday morning. That little story has been shaping to my own thinking about ministry and about the life of the church and the centrality of what we've been singing about, standing on every promise of God's word. So I want to encourage you today with what I like to call gospel motivation. It works like this, what God commands, he makes possible by what he promises, and that we obey God's commands as we believe his promises. And so I hope you have your Bible open at Hebrews and chapter 13 that illustrates this so clearly. Do you see that in verse 5 there we have a command? It says, keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have. That's plainly a command, and it's a command from Almighty God. It's a command for us to obey. But I want you to notice what comes next, because God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. There's a wonderful promise. And actually, if you look at the whole passage that was read, it's actually a list of commands. If you look back to the beginning there, there's a command for every verse. Number one, keep on loving one another as brothers. There's a command. Number two, do not forget to show hospitality to strangers. There's a command.

Three, continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison. There's a third command. Four, marriage should be kept, should be honored by all, and the marriage bed should be kept pure. And then five, keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have.

So command, command, command, command, command, and then, wonderfully, promise. And my question there for today is, did you hear the promise?

Keep your lives free from the love of money. Be content with what you have. And the question, obviously, is how. What will move you to do this? What will energize you to keep your life free from the love of money? What will strengthen you to find contentment in what God has actually given to you?

[6:30] Well, when God gives a command, he provides with it a promise that is the means by which his command can be fulfilled. Now, this is very wonderful. Now, I want you to take it in. It's very simple today, but I hope you'll be able to take it home and to find nourishment and strength from it.

God does not say, keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have or else. And he could have done that, couldn't he? God could have tied the command to a threat. But do you see how wonderful this is, that God ties the command to a promise, and that the promise is given as the means and the motive by which the command will be fulfilled? I'm just trying to settle this in our minds because it's really important. It's how this principle of gospel motivation works, that the motive and the power for obeying God's commands lies in believing God's promises. We obey God's commands as we believe God's promises. That's gospel motivation. That is how we live the Christian life. Now, let me just briefly give you a couple of examples of this in other places in the Bible so that you see that this is not just an isolated incident. It's actually a pattern. And once you see the pattern, you'll start spotting it all over the Bible. So a couple of cross-references, if you want to look on your iPhone or if you have a printed Bible in front of you, if you want to turn to 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 10, you'll see the same principle of gospel motivation. That's motivation through the promise being applied to ministry. Here you are at the 10th anniversary of the founding of this church, and God's blessing has been seen very evidently throughout these years. Now, here's a verse in which the Apostle Paul is speaking about motivation to continue serving in ministry, and I want you to see how he lays it out to Timothy.

1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 10. He says, we labor and strive. How? I mean, ministry is hard work, isn't it? The roles that each has place certain demands upon us. How are we going to sustain the ministry that God has trusted to us? Well, we labor and strive. How? Because we have put our hope in the living God who is the Savior of all people and especially of those who believe.

Is that what he's saying, Timothy? Ministry is hard work. It involves labor. It involves striving. We have to do that. But what's going to energize us and motivate us to keep making that effort of moving ministry forward? Answer, we've put our hope in the living God. The strength and the energy to go on laboring and striving in the service of God, the strengthened energy to sustain gospel ministry comes from believing that God is the Savior of all people, that God actually saves people. When you believe that God actually saves people, well, that motivates, strengthens, lifts us to continue to toil and to work hard and to strive in the ministry that God has given to us. So that's the principle applied to ministry. Let me give you one more cross-reference. Titus chapter 2 and verse 11. You want to just turn over a couple of pages over a couple of pages. Titus chapter 2 and verse 11. And here the apostle Paul's applying the same principle, the power of the promise, to our own pursuit of a holy life. What's going to keep you pressing forward in your own battles against temptation? What's going to enable you to stand against the wiles of the enemy? Well, notice what Paul says to Titus in chapter 2 and verse 11.

[10:52] The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.

Now, notice what he says. What is it that teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions? I mean, you might expect that the answer to that would be the law of God teaches us to say no to worldly passions, to ungodliness. But that's not what Paul says. And the reason that Paul does not say that is that, of course, the law tells us what to do and what not to do, but it can't give us the power to do what is right. Say no to ungodliness. Say no to worldly passions. Live a self-controlled, upright, upright, and godly life. These are clear commands. The question is, how am I going to do these things? What's going to give me the power, the energy to overcome the temptations that I experience and face week in and week out? And the answer to that is the grace of God has appeared in Christ Jesus.

Martin Luther made this point with his classic clarity. He had a way of just saying things very precisely. Luther put it this way. The law says do this and nothing is ever done. The gospel says believe this and everything is done already. You see what he's saying? Luther was convinced that it would be possible for him to hammer away from the pulpit, as it were, telling people what to do, what to do, what to do, and nothing would ever be done. What actually gets things done is the grace of God operating within the human heart as we believe the promises of God. That's what energizes the pursuit of a godly life. So you see this principle? I like to call it gospel motivation. Let me give you an illustration from a story that I think most of you will know well in the Old Testament. You remember the story of Naaman, who was a commander of the Syrian army, very distinguished position, and he had this dreadful problem of what at that time was an incurable disease. He had leprosy. And he heard through the wonderful witness of a little girl who was in his home that there was a prophet in Israel. And he went and he met with Elisha. And in 2 Kings 5 and verse 10, the Bible records that Elisha said to him, go wash yourself seven times in the river Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed. Now Naaman heard this and he was immediately offended. By the way, that speaks to us today. An awful lot of people are offended by God's commands today, aren't they? You find that? Oh, I'm very offended at the commands of God in the Bible.

[14:16] Well, that's exactly what where Naaman was. He had absolutely no intention of conforming to the commands of God, washing in a filthy river. He was angry. The Bible says that he turned and went off in a rage.

That was his response to the command of God. And he would have returned home, taking his leprosy with him, except for one thing, his servants.

The servants came near to him and said, My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you. Will you not do it?

Has he actually said to you, wash and be clean? Naaman, you're angry about the command.

Naaman, didn't you hear the promise? He said, wash and be clean.

[15:27] Has anyone in the world ever said a thing like that to you? This is a great word. Why in the world would you not do it?

Now, you see the point. Naaman had heard the command and he'd taken offense. He was about to go home, carrying his leprosy with him. And the servants are coming and they're basically saying, did you not hear the promise?

Somehow it got lost in Naaman's hearing in the midst of the command until the servants drew it out and made it wonderfully clear.

And when that happened, you see, there was a change in Naaman's mind and in his heart. When he heard the promise, what did he do? He obeyed the command. And he went and he washed, as he had been told in the River Jordan.

And the scripture records how wonderfully his flesh was healed and wonderfully restored. See, when we believe God's promises, we will obey his commands.

[16:29] And the more we believe God's promises, the more we will obey his commands. That's how the Christian life is actually lived. Most of you, I'm sure, will know the name of C.H. Spurgeon.

Spurgeon told a story from back in the 19th century about a pastor who went with some money from a benevolent fund that the church had for helping the poor.

And he took this money to the home of a widow who was in great need. He knocks on the door and there's no answer.

He knocks on the door again. No answer. So he concludes that there's no one at home and returns back himself. The following Sunday, the pastor's there and here's the widow and he says to her, you know, I came to your house during the week and I brought a gift from the church to help you. And she said, well, when did you come? He said, well, it was Wednesday. It was about noon. Oh, she said, rather embarrassed. I was at home and I heard the knock on the door but I didn't open the door because I thought it was the man coming to collect the rent.

[18:01] Now, you see, dear friends, the default assumption of the fallen human heart is that if God draws near at all, he's calling for the rent.

There are millions who have some idea of religion who have never understood grace. Their whole idea of Christianity is simply that they're going to be told what they need to do.

They feel that Christ has a list of demands to lay upon them, that they have neither the desire nor the ability to meet and as long as they think that God is calling for the rent, they will never open the door.

Dear friends, has God not trusted us with the most marvelous good news of his grace? That in Jesus Christ, God comes to bring to us and to give to us that which we do not have and that which we so desperately, desperately need.

And when a person comes to believe that God in Jesus Christ draws near to give us what we do not have, anyone who comes to really believe that by definition is going very quickly to open the door.

[19:32] So here is a marvelous promise. promise. And I try to just press the central importance of keeping the promises of God front and center because they are life-giving for all who are on the path of obeying his commands.

So let's just focus in on this promise. Let me try and press it home because my prayer for today is that all of us will go with this wonderful promise ringing in our minds and our hearts and our ears as well.

God has said, never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you. Well, what a promise that is. Because to be forsaken by Almighty God would be the worst thing that a human being could ever imagine. A person forsaken by God would be completely alone, completely without help, and completely without hope.

And God says, you, my child, will never be in that position. You will never be alone. You will never be without my help.

[20:53] You will never, ever, in all of your life, be without the hope that you find in me. Scholars point out that there are five negatives in the original language of this promise.

And one commentator says that it may be the strongest negation, the strongest negative in all of the Bible. never will I leave you.

Never will I forsake you. Of course, in English, a double negative is a positive.

So if I say, I'm not, not in love, that means I am in love. It's a strange way the thing that it turns around like that.

But in Greek, if you have a double negative, it simply makes the negative stronger. So in Greek, if one said the equivalent of I'm not, not in love, that would mean I'm really definitely not in love.

[22:01] Now here, in the original language, we have five negatives, five, all piled up one on top of another.

It's very difficult to actually translate, but the nearest we could maybe get to it would be I will never, never leave you. Never, never, never will I forsake you.

So when Spurgeon preached on this verse, his title was simply five words. Never, never, never, never, never. That's a great title for a sermon on this verse.

And this is the promise, dear friends, of God himself. And God is Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

So when God says, I will never leave you and I will never forsake you, he is saying, there will never be a time, dear friend, when you do not have a Father who loves you.

[23:01] There will never be a time when you do not have a Savior who guards you. There will never be a time when you do not have the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God himself to sustain you.

And this wonderful promise is ours in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. All of God's promises are yes and amen.

They're all ours in him. The reason that we will never be forsaken by God is that he was forsaken by the Father on our behalf when he hung on that cross and cried out in the darkness, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus was forsaken on the cross so that you, dear brother, dear sister, and I should never know what God forsaken us is like.

There may be times when we feel forsaken. There may be times when you cannot feel the light of God's presence or the light of God's love. But rest assured of this, in Jesus Christ, you are never alone.

[24:28] You are never helpless. And you are never without hope. for God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

Now let me just press it, if I may, one step forward, and then we're through for this morning.

Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 5 is not the first time that this wonderful promise is given in the

Bible.

God gave it repeatedly at different places. And this is a promise for us in every circumstance of life. This promise is always ours. But I think that seeing particularly when God gave this promise helps us to apply it to particular situations of our lives.

So I want to just apply the promise to three particular situations in these last moments today. And the first is for a person who is facing an overwhelming challenge.

Now I don't know you, but I just have to assume that in a gathering like this there are a number of us who in one way or another in life would say that's me.

[25:49] I am facing an overwhelming challenge. It might be in relation to marriage or in relation to your children or an unusual pressure that you're facing in your work or some sphere of service to which God has called you, a struggle in your life.

And I want you just for a moment as you think about your overwhelming challenge to put yourself in the shoes of Joshua and try and imagine what it was like for him.

Can you imagine being called to be Moses' successor? What do you think about that Callum?

Being Moses' successor, you know, you've got to lead these people. Well, what's their history?

Well, they've been wandering getting nowhere for 40 years. What's their history? How did they treat the last guy? Not very well. Could you imagine the pressures that are on Joshua?

He faces this overwhelming challenge to lead God's people into the promised land after 40 years of getting absolutely nowhere. And as Joshua faces the overwhelming challenge, what does God do?

[27:04] He gives him this promise, Joshua 1 verses 5 and 6, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you, nor forsake you, so you be strong and you be courageous.

you facing an overwhelming challenge? This is the promise for you. God says, I will never leave you. I will never forsake you.

Now draw strength, draw courage from that. Another time that this promise was given was to a man in a very different situation, a man who really needed to face up to taking a risky step of faith.

And that man's name was Solomon, King Solomon, David's son. Solomon was really in the opposite position of Joshua. David had subdued Israel's enemies, he had secured the kingdom, he passed on the most marvelous legacy to his son, and David's last words to Solomon are recorded in 1 Chronicles in chapter 28, David makes a long list of all that he's done to prepare for the building of the temple.

The detail is absolutely astonishing. He says to his son, I'm giving you the plans, and I'm giving you all the gold, gold for lampstands and for the table and for the forks and for the cups.

[28:36] I mean, everything is placed into Solomon's hands. And then David says this, 1 Chronicles 28 and verse 20. David said to Solomon his son, be strong and courageous and do the work.

Do not be afraid or discouraged for the Lord God my God is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work of the service of the temple of the Lord is finished.

I think that David's greatest fear as he lay on his deathbed and spoke to his son was that his son would be presented with such a marvellous opportunity and that he would simply play it safe.

And so what David is saying here is, look, you are being given this opportunity. I'm placing all of this into your hands. Now, do not be afraid.

Press forward in the venture of faith to which you are being called. Why? Because God has said, I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. And you press on with this work until it is done, until all the work of the service of the temple of the Lord is finished.

[30:01] Don't even think of quitting halfway through. That's what he's saying to Solomon, his son. Solomon could so easily have said, oh, even my illustrious father, David didn't attempt something as risky as to build the temple of God.

Why should I risk doing all of this? David says, do it. Because this is what God is calling you to do. God has said, I will never leave you.

I will never forsake you. So someone here today, and in your heart, you know that God is calling you to take a step of faith. faith. And there's something within you that just wants to retreat back and to be cautious.

And here's the promise as it was given to Solomon. God says to you, I will never leave you. I will never forsake you.

And on that basis, you step forward in faith to do all that God is calling you to do. And that brings us back to Hebrews where the promise is given again.

[31:11] And some of you will know that the story of Hebrews was a story of Christian believers who lost a lot. Some of them had their property confiscated.

Some of them were put in prison on account of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There had been a great deal of loss in the congregation of believers to whom this letter was first written.

And again, I have to assume that there are many within the congregation who, in one way or another, have experienced the pain of significant loss.

And into that reality, God speaks this wonderful promise, and I would want you to hear it in your own experience today.

God says to you in the loss that you have experienced, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.

[32:20] It's so lovely to be in a church in Scotland, and to be in a Presbyterian church in Scotland. I grew up in a little Baptist church, but I remember visiting on a number of occasions in Holleroo Abbey, in Edinburgh, and one of my vivid memories is of singing the hymn that's based on St.

Patrick's breastplate. I only ever heard it there, but the words are so marvelous, I wonder if they're familiar to you.

St. Patrick wrote these words, Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friends and stranger.

Dear brother, sister, you know this so well, the Christian life is made possible by the presence and power of Jesus Christ.

Christ for us, Christ with us, Christ in us. the presence of Christ is with you.

[33:59] God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you, and with Christ you can face anything.

Let's pray together, shall we? God will I to in all that you call us to do and all that you command us to obey, we thank you for your great and precious promises that are ours in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grant that we may be strengthened in all that you call us to pursue in these coming days by this promise that has been laid before us today.

We thank you for it and pray that we will live in the good of it through Jesus Christ our Lord in whose wonderful name we pray. God's people together said Amen.