

Standing On The Promises

OPEN: I'd like you to stand with me as we sing this great Hymn:

"Standing on the Promises."

Sing with me:

"Standing on the promises that cannot fail
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail
Standing on the promises of God.

(Chorus)

Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;
Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises I cannot fall
List'ning every moment to the Spirit's call,
Resting in my Savior as my all in all,
Standing on the promises of God.

(Chorus)

Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;
Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God."

(Speak to the audience)...

Standing on the Promises.

Promises that cannot fail.

Promises that will help me not to fall.

ILLUS: You know – as mortals – we have trouble standing on OUR promises. As my kids were growing up I learned to be very careful about what kind of promises I made. I learned that if I told them that:

- I was going to do something for them
- I was going to take them someplace
- I was going get something for them...

And then (for whatever reason) I didn't do that, you know what they'd say to me?

(wait for audience to respond)

That's right: "BUT YOU PROMISED!"

Now why would they say that to me?

They'd say this because they were counting on me to stand on MY promises.

Now the problem for me was... I am mortal.

I'd forget things. Have you ever forgotten things?

I'd get busy. Have you ever gotten busy?

I'd get distracted. Have you gotten distracted?

We all have.

So I learned, early on, to be very careful what I would tell my children I'd do for them, because I am frail and faulty enough to fall short. And I knew they'd hold me responsible to do what I said I would do.

And sometimes... I couldn't.

But, that's because I'm mortal.

I fail.

I forget.

I make mistakes.

God however doesn't suffer from those problems.

He's immortal. He'd divine. He doesn't forget.

When God makes a promise... He keeps it.

In Isaiah God declared: "What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do." Isaiah 46:11b

And again God said, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand." Isaiah 14:24

God STANDS ON His promises.

And God's people in the Old Testament learned to rely on those promises:

The writer of the 119th Psalm said "Your promises have been THOROUGHLY TESTED, and your servant loves them." Psalm 119:140

And David declared "...The LORD is FAITHFUL to all his promises and loving toward all he has made." Psalm 145:13

This was such a powerful reality for those in the Old Testament that it influenced how they prayed. If you examine the prayers of the great people of the Old Testament you'd see that they began their prayers, praising God for the things He'd created, or the things He'd done in their lives. Then they would cite a specific promise God had made. And based on that promise they make their petition before His throne.

They weren't nagging God.

They were telling God: “You said this was what you’d do, we believe it, and NOW we’re watching for to see what you’ll do.

And God would answer their prayers!!!

Now, that’s just in the Old Testament. But Hebrews tells us that no matter what promises God made in the Old Testament “... the ministry Jesus has received is ... founded on BETTER promises.” Hebrews 8:6

Better promises?

In fact, Peter tells us “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” 2 Peter 1:3-4

So, Jesus has given us BETTER promises than those the Old Testament Saints received. And these promises give us everything we need for life and godliness. In fact, these promises help us “participate in the divine nature, AND they help us escape the corruption in this world.

So what kind of promises did Jesus give us?

Well, three of the most important ones are found right here in this 1st chapter of Acts. These three promises are foundational. They are central to our faith. Without these 3 promises the teachings of our faith would be no different than those that other religions teach.

What are these 3 promises of Jesus?

1. Promise of the Holy Spirit.
2. The Promise of Power through that Holy Spirit.
3. And the Promise that Jesus will return to take us to Heaven.

So, let's take them one at a time:

1st – there's the Promise of the Holy Spirit

In Acts 1:4 Jesus said "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

What prophecy was that?

It was from Joel 2:28-29 'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.'

Now this promise was powerfully displayed about 10 days later – at the Feast of Pentecost. The Apostles were meeting together in an upper room and the sound of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the room where they were. Something like tongues of fire came and rested on all of them, and they were suddenly able to speak in languages they had never learned.

A large crowd gathered outside and were able to understand these men in their own native languages - whether their native language was Arabic, Egyptian, Italian, Greek or other language. And I'm suspecting the disciples then went outside and the crowds marveled that they were able to hear these men praise God in their native languages, even though there was no way these men should have been able to know those languages.

At this point, Peter gets up and preaches a sermon about what was taking place. About the Spirit's power and the prophecies of the Old Testament that spoke of this moment and of the Messiah that they pointed to. He told of Jesus being sent by God - preaching and teaching and doing

miraculous signs and wonders. But being mistreated and crucified and ultimately rising from the dead.

And they (the crowd) had been the ones who put Him to death.

Peter's message was so powerful that the crowd was convicted of their guilt and they interrupted his sermon, crying out: What can we do???

And Peter replied: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the GIFT of the Holy Spirit. The PROMISE is for you and your children and for all who are far off— for all whom the Lord our God will call." Acts 2:38-39

Thus, the Holy Spirit introduced Himself on Pentecost in two ways:

The first way the Spirit was revealed was with an in-your-face, dramatic, attention getting show of force and power through the Apostles. This was a one time event to get the attention of the crowd.

But the other way the Spirit was introduced was less flashy.

Peter said the Spirit was God's GIFT to those who believed, repented and were baptized into Christ.

This gift (this Spirit of God) was God's MARK on us.

Ephesians 1:13-14 told us "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession— to the praise of his glory."

The Holy Spirit is God's presence INSIDE of us as Christians.

He Marks us as belonging to God.

AND God's Spirit inside us is a promise from God that He will never leave us or forsake us, because He's always with us... inside us. He goes everywhere we go.

God literally moves with us as we go to work,

As we play

As we shop

As we watch TV

Or read a book.

As we drive down the road.

AND when we lay down at night to sleep and get up in the morning.

He's there ALL the time.

Apparently the Old Testament Saints didn't have the Spirit in their lives like we do. This promise of the Spirit's presence... was only for us.

In John 7:38-39 Jesus said: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

So God gave YOU and ME a promise that no one in the Old Testament had.

When you and I believe in Jesus, and obey Him in repenting and being baptized into Him we are filled with The Spirit Of God.

The 2nd promise was this: The Promise of Power

In Acts 1:8 Jesus told His Apostles: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

That power was displayed when the Holy Spirit came on the Apostles with the sound of a rushing wind and flames as of fire. That didn't happen to everybody else. This was God's light and sound show for the audience.

But the power of God's Spirit that you and I have in us - though it's a little less showy - is just as dynamic. Paul wrote the Ephesians church and said that he prayed that God would “strengthen (them) with power through his Spirit in (their) inner being”. Ephesians 3:16

Why?

Because God was “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” Ephesians 3:20

In other words, God's Spirit inside of us strengthens. He is able to do more for us than all we could ever ask or even imagine.

In II Timothy 1:7 we're told that “God did not give us a Spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline”

God's Spirit enables us to be filled with God's kind of power; to be filled with His kind of discipline; and to be filled His kind of love for others.

Essentially God's Spirit gets inside of me.

Then He begins to tinker with me.

He changes me into what God wants me to be.

He molds me into the image of God.

And as He shapes and molds and changes me, I begin to reflect the God who gave me that Spirit to begin with. That's why in Galatians 5:22-23 we're told that once we're filled with God's Spirit we should begin to show some very special fruit:

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

You see, without God's Spirit you and I can't show God's kind love, joy, peace, etc..

But now... wait a minute.

Haven't you ever seen a pagan who was a loving person?

Of course you have.

Have you ever encountered a non-Christian who was patient? Kind? Good? Faithful?

Yes, we have!

So, if people can be filled with love, joy, peace, patience, etc. WITHOUT God's Spirit inside of them, why do I need God's Spirit to help me show those traits?

Well, it's like this:

ILLUS: You all know what a car with a 4 cylinder engine is?

Let's say I own a 4 cylinder vehicle and I want to pack it full of goodies and take a trip to the lake. Will it get me there?

Of course it will.

Suppose I want to take it on a trip to California. Will that 4 cylinder car get me to my destination?

Of course it will.

That little 4 cylinder will take you to all kinds of places... but there's not much power under the hood. If you want to pull anything of any consequence or have significant pick and go however, you're going to be disappointed. It's just an underpowered vehicle to help you save on gas.

But now, I like watching youtube videos on care and I know you can take a car like that and you can trick it out to give it more power... or you can take that engine out and replace it with an the engine that's far more powerful.

Essentially, that's what Christ's Spirit does inside of us. He takes our 4 cylinder lives... and replaces that engine with one that has more pick up and go. That's what the Spirit of Christ does inside of you and me.

So... Jesus promises us

- His Spirit. It's the promise that we will never be forsaken because He lives IN us.
- And, His Power – it's the promise we will never be feeble – He lives THROUGH us.

And that Spirit... and the power He gives us is all we need in THIS world. That is, until Jesus fulfills His LAST promise.

And that Promise is that He's going to return

And He's going to come back for us.

And He's going to take us with Him... to a better world.

As Jesus ascended into Heaven, two angels appeared to the Apostles and said...

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1:11

As Jesus told His disciples in John - "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." John 14:1-3

Now, this is AN EVEN BETTER promise than the first two.

Jesus has promised us His Spirit and He's promised us Power through that Spirit. But Jesus' promise that He would return is a better promise than those other two promises could ever be.

Now, you might ask: Pastor Stephen how can you say that?

(wait for someone in the crowd to ask)

Well, I'm glad you asked.

It's a better promise because EVEN if I have God's Spirit inside of me all my life. And EVEN if I have the power of God just oozing out of me.

If Jesus doesn't come back for me, when I die, I'll stay dead.

If Jesus doesn't come back for me, the grave will be my final resting place.

If Jesus doesn't come back for me, this is all there is, and there ain't no more.

Because – if Jesus doesn't come back for us, there will be no resurrection of the dead.

But He is coming back!!!

I Peter 3:9-14 says “The Lord is not slow in keeping his PROMISE, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord WILL COME (pause) like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

But in keeping with his PROMISE we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”

Jesus will come back, because He promised He would.

CLOSE: The year was 1988 in the country of Armenia. A man named Samuel squatted beside his son Armand, as he was about to go to school that day, and said: “Have a good day at school, and remember, no matter what, I’ll always be there for you.”

They hugged and the boy ran off to school.

Hours later, a powerful earthquake rocked the area. The radio announced that there were 1000s of casualties, and Samuel could get no confirmation about his son from anyone. So, he grabbed his coat and headed for the schoolyard.

And there, before his eyes, he saw his young boy’s school was a pile of debris.

Other parents were standing around crying.

But not Samuel. He found the place where Armand's classroom used to be and began pulling a broken beam off the pile of rubble. He then grabbed a rock and put it to the side, & then grabbed another one.

One of the parents looking on asked, "What are you doing?"

"Digging for my son," Samuel answered.

The man then said, "You're just going to make things worse! The building is unstable," and tried to pull Samuel away from his work.

But Samuel just set his jaw and kept working.

As time wore on, one by one, the other parents left. Then a firefighter tried to pull Samuel away from the rubble. Samuel looked at him and said, "Won't you help me?" But, the firefighter left and Samuel kept digging.

All through the night and into the next day, Samuel continued digging. Parents placed flowers and pictures of their children on the ruins. But, Samuel just kept working.

He picked up a beam and pushed it out of the way when he heard a faint cry. "Help! Help!" Samuel listened but didn't hear anything again.

Then he heard a muffled voice, "Papa?"

Samuel began to dig furiously. Finally he could see his son.

"Come on out, son!" he said with relief.

But his son said "No. Let the other kids come out first because I know you'll get me."

So, child after child emerged until, finally, little Armand appeared. Samuel took him in his arms and his son said to him, "I told the other

kids not to worry because you told me that you'd always be there for me!"

Fourteen children were rescued from their tomb, because a father came back for His child.

On that final day there will a loud command, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet call of God. And millions will rise from their tombs, rescued from death... because Jesus WILL come back for His children.

INVITATION