

# Promise Believers #4 - Unpopular Promises

by Bob Hoekstra

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*God's unpopular promises are true and critical to our lives, and remind us of our need for Him, drive us to Jesus, and shape our lives according to His will.*

**Duration:** 57:20

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 20:29, 2 Timothy 3:12

**Topics:** "Gods Promises", "Consequences Of Sin"

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## Description

In this sermon, the pastor discusses the unpopular promises of God, specifically regarding the consequences of sin and the standards of righteousness. He emphasizes the prevalence of pride and self-exaltation in the world, using the example of Muhammad Ali. The pastor also mentions the belief in the new age thinking of humans evolving into gods. However, he reminds the congregation of the biblical promise that in the last days, perilous times will come, with evil men and imposters growing worse and deceiving others. The sermon concludes with a mention of a verse that haunted a godly man in Dallas, Texas, highlighting the importance of standing on God's promises.

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## Transcript

Lord, You give us so many reasons to boast in You, rejoice in You, to give You thanks and praise and honor. And as we look into Your Word, Lord, may a spirit of worship just overtake our hearts. May we never think the worship ends when the Word is opened.

May You get the worship, the glory, the honor You deserve even now as You speak to us. May Your Word by Your Spirit create awe, reverence, humility, faith, openness, honesty. And in our hearts, Lord, may You get the glory You deserve.

Speak to us more of Your precious promises, Lord, even promises the flesh might not want to hear, but they're as true as all the rest. And we trust You to unfold these now to us in Jesus' name. Amen.

We have looked at some of the tremendous promises of God. I'm looking forward to our last study tomorrow night. We're reserving for that time, I think, the most exceedingly great and precious promises, some we haven't looked at yet.

But all of the promises of God are true. Some are exciting. Some are gloriously exhilarating.

All of God's promises will be fulfilled by Him. All of God's promises can shape our lives as they build our faith. But not all of God's promises are what you could call popular.

Not every promise God has made does man go, oh, yes. Some of the promises cause man and the flesh to say, oh, whoa. We're going to look in this study at some of the unpopular promises.

Just because they're unpopular to man and speak death to the flesh does not mean they aren't critical and aren't important. Maybe not as exciting, but just as true. And if we'll hear them and receive them, they'll do their work in us.

We'll probably see in many ways that the unpopular promises of God often carry out the work that the law of God is intended to do. The law of God cannot give life. It can only describe God's holy life and our absence of life on our own.

That's humbling. That drives you to Jesus Christ. So do the unpopular promises of God.

We'll reserve for tomorrow morning promises of God and how they're related to the grace of God directly tied in by the scriptures themselves. To me that's the high point of the whole study. But let's not diminish, let's not demean, let's not dismiss the unpopular promises of God.

If God made them, they're important to His plan and work. For example, unpopular promises regarding the consequences of sin. Those go back as far as Genesis 3, verse 16.

Here's a promise to the woman. I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you. Not too many women shout glory hallelujah at that promise. It's a tough set of promises.

What's it all about? The consequences of sin. God did not intend it to be this way for man. God didn't want man to obey.

He gave man room to obey. He knew man would disobey and He granted that latitude of freedom that lets real love from God eventually draw a real love response from us. Not some kind of robotic, automatic, no choice involved kind of love.

But when man sinned, these were promises to the woman. In light of this sin, in light of being part of a fallen humanity, part of a fallen human race, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you. But the man is right there getting an unpopular promise too. He's also part of fallen humanity.

In fact, he has the primary responsibility. Genesis 3, 17 and 18. Then to Adam he said, because you have heeded the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you saying you shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground for your sake.

In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

For out of it you were taken. For dust you are and to dust you shall return. Not an exciting popular promise but right on and true and man has been walking in it even if he didn't want to ever since.

Why? Because of sin. Sin has heavy consequences. God promised it would be that way.

He knew in rebellion and disobedience there are consequences. The ultimate promise regarding the consequences of sin appears in places like the gospel of John chapter 8 at verse 24. John 8, 24.

Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins for if you do not believe that I am he, you will die in your sins. That's not a popular promise. It's absolutely true.

You can stake your eternal existence on it. It's that true. All who will not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that he is the great I am, the Son of God, God the Son, God in the flesh, Emmanuel, and that he is Creator, Redeemer, and the only Savior for sins.

All who will not believe that will die in their sins. It's an absolute promise. In many ways it's not a popular promise, certainly among humanity.

It's far too narrow for a tolerant world. Maybe you've noticed how toleration is the great code of this day and age. Intolerance is the unforgivable cultural sin now.

If you're against anything and you're convinced it's absolutely wrong, then you're absolutely narrow-minded. Well, this kind of promise, if you believe it, makes you very narrow-minded. We need to be narrow-minded, as narrow as the road, as narrow as the way.

I think it was a man named Bloom, I think he's a professor at Boston College, he wrote a book called The Closing of the American Mind. Amazing thesis this guy came up with. Fits a lot of biblical truth.

He said the American mind has become so open to everything, it's now closed to absolute truth. Wow. This is an unpopular promise.

It's too narrow for a tolerant world. But let's let our lives and our thinking be shaped by this promise. Unless you believe in Jesus, you will die in your sins.

Man needs to hear that promise. It's unpopular, but it's humbling. But it points us in the right direction.

Praise God, one of the reasons we're here is we've stood on this promise. And because we responded, we don't have to worry about the awesome, deadly consequences of it. We have come to believe in Him.

Here's the end of the line promise in Matthew 13 regarding consequences of sin. Matthew 13 verses 49 and 50. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Oh, that's an unpopular promise. But here's how Jesus put it, so it will be. When the Lord makes a promise that anything will be, it will be.

There's no possibility that it won't be. This is absolute certainty. Unbelieving, unrighteous lives will be separated from God forever for judgment.

This is a promise. It's so unpopular. In a world that denies sin and a world that denies God, oh, this is an unpopular promise.

It reminds people of both. There is sin and there is God. There's accountability to Him for that sin.

Some of the unpopular promises of God, certain though they are, they're regarding the consequences of sin. There's another arena of unpopular promises. It's regarding the standards of righteousness.

How lives are measured. Matthew 23.12. Matthew 23.12, the first part of the verse. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled.

That's a promise. It's a divine promise. It's a promise of God.

It's an exceedingly unpopular promise in a world of pride. Oh, there's so much pride and arrogance in the world. So much self-exaltation.

It didn't start with Cassius Clay, Muhammad Ali, I'm the greatest. You see, I'm kind of ranting and raving on the newsreels. If you don't know what a newsreel is, just praise God you're young.

I can just see his face. I'm the greatest. Well, God has something to say about that.

Oh, no you aren't. There may have been sports heroes before him who proclaimed their own greatness, but he sure stands out as a pioneer. Formerly they were more like a Lou Gehrig, you know, dying and saying, well, I'm just the luckiest guy on earth.

Amazing measures of humility, really. Boy, so much of that's gone in this culture of ours. I believe it was planted here basically because of the gospel seeds in our heritage.

We knew from the word that pride was an abomination. It was on the top of the list of what God hates. And even proud people tried to hide it.

It was a cultural no-no. Boy, those days are gone. Now you proclaim your greatness, and the greater you shout it, and the greater you think you are, the greater you become in our society.

And then the Lord comes through with a very unpopular promise. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled. You can count on it.

You might say, I know some pretty old proud people. Listen, they're accountable to an eternal God. Case isn't closed yet.

This is an absolute promise. It shall be fulfilled. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled.

There's no way around it. But you know, it's not just a matter of the world and its pride and our culture and its loss of humility. This has even become an unpopular promise in a proud contemporary church world.

Humility has been slipping as a Christian godly virtue. It's not in the top ten anymore. Now we hear sermons and see announcement of classes on self-assertion, self-actualization, self-esteem.

All meager, feeble, humanistic, clinical attempts to turn pride into something else. Who are we fooling? Not God. Not God.

This is a promise. Sure, it's not popular. Yeah, it nails the flesh.

But do you have any flesh that shouldn't be nailed? I don't either. There is no flesh that shouldn't be nailed. Every day Jesus said, you want to follow me? I'll tell you how.

I'll tell you what's involved. If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily. Know thyself, death thyself.

All right, now you're ready. Come on, follow me. A call to discipleship is a humbling invitation.

Only responded to by those willing to lose their lives. And amazingly, they're the only ones who find a life. All the rest, guarding that life.

Nurturing, cherishing, protecting it. Even trying to pretend they're a follower of Jesus while they're doing it. They lose their entire life.

They never find one. Life is only found following Jesus Christ. This isn't a popular promise.

But it's as true as promises come. From the God of promises. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled.

Oh, may we let our lives be shaped even by these unpopular promises. You know, I believe these promises that are so unpopular in the world. So unpopular to natural humanity.

So unpopular to the flesh and self-life of a Christian. Deep in our spirit, in the heart of the new creature in Christ. These can become very popular.

They point the way to us. They cry out a warning of the wrong way. The way of self, the way of flesh.

The way of living for time instead of eternity. But among humanity, among a carnal church world, within the flesh every one of us carries around with us. That is just the natural humanity of the human family.

That we still lug around with us. This is unpopular. But oh, it's absolutely true.

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled. Galatians chapter 6. Another unpopular promise regarding the standards of righteousness. How man is measured before God.

Galatians 6, starting at verse 7. Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows that he will also reap.

For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption. That's a promise. Not a popular promise.

You want to get people excited? You want to get people praising God and shouting hallelujah? You want to even enthuse the world religiously? You don't turn to this promise. But we must turn to promises like these. This is part of the heart and mind of God.

God has declared these things. They're absolutely so. The implications and consequences will fully be worked out and certainly be worked out in the history of man in our own lives.

What a promise this is. But you know this is an unpopular promise. In a world that denies accountability.

In a world interested in blaming. In being classified as a victim. Well listen, there's enough victimization to go around.

I'm sure we've all been done wrong but that's not our problem. Our problem is those that we have wronged. That's our problem.

That's what we're accountable for. And if we sow to the flesh. If we plant seeds day by day in thought and word and deed and attitude and priority.

That feeds the flesh. That indulges the natural humanity of our lives. That leaves both the considerations of the will of God and the resources of God out of the picture.

Just flesh. This is a promise from God that will reap corruption. God is built in to the universe.

That whatever is within the seeds that we plant will be in the crop that we harvest. It's just built in to creation. You cannot plant a kernel of corn and have a peach grow out of it.

Well, just as impossible to plant spiritual seeds daily of carnality and expect spirituality to grow out of it. It cannot be. God has promised us it doesn't work that way.

It can never work that way. Now again, that's not popular. It's an unpopular promise in a world that denies accountability.

Wherever the flesh rears its ugly head in the church of Jesus Christ, this promise is unpopular. And let's face it, in far too great a measure, in tragic and sad measure, the American church has made room for the flesh. We teach people almost sometimes in churches how to sow to the flesh.

Instead of preaching death to self and flesh nailed on the cross, it's, hey, you deserve this, you deserve that. Indulge yourself. Even test the limits of your Christian liberty.

Just inviting people, see how far we can get them, how close, and maybe even how deeply satisfied with their own carnality. Well, there's a promise of God that cries out, wakes us up, warns us. He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption.

God doesn't even have to do a thing really about it. In that seed of the flesh life, there's corruption. Corruption to destroy marriages.

Corruption to destroy relationships. Corruption to destroy churches. Corruption to destroy ministry.

It's a promise. We can count on it. We can be warned by it.

We can be directed by it. Sure, it's unpopular. But if we let our lives be shaped by the absolute reality of it, we'll end up praising God, thanking God, rejoicing in God, and spared by God.

The tragedies of self-centered, carnal indulgence. Wasted time. Here's another unpopular promise.

Revelation 3.16. I guarantee it will be. Not on my word, but on the promise of God. Revelation 3.16. This is the Lord Jesus Christ speaking to his church.

Many have sort of tracked through these seven letters to the seven churches of Asia and have seen amazing correspondences to the history of the church. Now, I'm sure that throughout the church age, all seven varieties of these churches have always flourished side by side, to some degree, and varying in measure, I'm sure. But I think that that's probably one of the reasons God put them here.

They not only show types of churches available in every day and age of the church age, but there's probably also a flow here of what God saw would come to pass in this age of grace, the age of the church. If that's so, this church of Laodicea is right down there at the end of the church age. Look at this promise.

Revelation 3.16. So then, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you, vomit you, out of my mouth. Well, that is not a popular promise. Now, I too, personally, am much more stirred, blessed, encouraged, touched by the promise, say, in Isaiah 42.

I've been the Bruce Reed, and I praise God he didn't bust me. I've been the flickering wick, and I praise God he didn't blow me out. But as sure as we can count on those realities, here's an unpopular reality.

The lukewarm, the Lord wants nothing to do with it. Compromises His name, waters down the church, changes the message and purpose of everything. Lukewarmness.

You know, God doesn't at all mind dealing with that flickering wick where you can hardly even get a measure of temperature. You know, cold. Oh, He's totally committed to it.

Fueling, fanning, bringing that toward a white-hot spiritual heat. It's the lukewarm thing that this promise confronts. It's a promise.

Because you're neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. The Lord wants to fellowship intimately and deeply with us. He is a God of light, and our God is a consuming fire.

He wants us fervent in spirit, Romans 12. He never wants it to come to this. But we can count on this promise.

I don't understand all the implications of it. I don't have any apprehension for those who truly know the Lord as far as their eternal destiny here. But there will be in the church world those who need to hear this promise.

Lukewarm. I will spew you out of my mouth. It's an unpopular promise, especially in this compromising, user-friendly church age that we live in.

This is not in the church builder's manual in the 20th century American church. It's too offensive. In a church world that wants to be very, very careful never to say anything to offend anyone.

Why be so concerned about that? Because they might do the worst thing imaginable. They might not come back next Sunday. What's happened to apprehension about hell's fire? The church is all worried about who will show up next week.

Because we've forgotten promises like this. But it is a promise. And if we'll accept it in its absolute certainty, you know what it will do? It will guide and shape our lives.

It will leave us with this humble, urgent thought, Oh Lord, fan the fire in my heart. And if there's just a tiny little flicker there Lord that you can't even measure, I mean it's cold. Oh Lord, in your mercy and grace, come minister to my need.

Fuel that fire. Fan that fire. Make me white hot for you Lord.

He's the light. He's the heat. He's the fire.

We don't have to be stoking our own flames. There's no way to do it. Boy, this drives us to the Lord, doesn't it? No one wants to be spewed out in the sense of no intimate fellowship, no more being used.

Some in this category may not at all know the Lord, but they're in the church life. Oh, there's many in the church life that don't know the Lord. Near and far.

But even knowing Him, we want to walk in intimacy with Him. Communicating, fellowshiping, serving, knowing, growing. We don't want to be spewed out.

Set aside, unused, vessel unfit for service. Sure the promise is unpopular, but I think the glorious work of God in all of these unpopular promises really comes to this. They're humbling.

They surface our need. They throw us on the mercy and grace of God. Praise God for promises like that.

Well, of the thousands of promises, there are a few more that are unpopular. I know you can't wait to hear them. Promises regarding the end times.

1 Timothy chapter 4. 1 Timothy chapter 4. Promises regarding the end times. The last days. The days nearing the Lord's return.

This is a promise. Toward the end of the church age, some will depart. Not might.

Some will. It's an absolute certainty. The Lord looking down the halls of time declared it as a promise.

An absolute certainty. Some will depart from the faith. We're called to earnestly contend for the faith.

Not faith. The faith. The faith is the objective truth of the Word of God in which we are to place our faith.

And the faith, the truth of God in the Word, we're to earnestly contend for it. Not be contentious. Not be nasty.

Not be looking for a fight. Not craving trouble. Not loving it when a furor develops.

But earnestly doing battle for the reality, the truth, the purity of the Word of God. Taught and lived. But some in the latter times will depart from the faith.

Far from contending for it, they'll drift away from it. Oh, they may still use the name of Jesus. They may still call themselves Christians.

They may be renowned worldwide religious leaders. But some of them will have departed from the faith. How serious will it be? They'll give heed to deceiving spirits.

Doctrines of demons. Teachings inspired by demons. At the Calvary Chapel Bible College is where I've been blessed to teach three or four different kinds of classes at five or six or seven different campuses.

In teaching one called Contending for the Faith, one of the students for one of the study projects turned in with his paper on aberrant doctrines and strange things happening in the church, a little cassette to illustrate what he was writing about. I read his paper. Well done.

Put the tape in. Blew me away. One of the students for one of the study projects turned in with his paper on aberrant doctrines and strange things happening in the church, a little cassette to illustrate what he was

writing about.

I read his paper. Well done. Put the tape in.

Blew me away. I'm not seeing every crazy thing in the church. At times I've been a part of the crazy things in the church.

I don't want to be ever again, but you know, you get caught up in religious zeal early on in the faith and you can get kind of sidetracked or tempted to. But I'd never heard or seen anything like this. The church was in Mission Viejo, Orange County, Southern California.

The pastor is moderating the meeting. He says, Pray with me now as we call upon the name of the Lord. Lord, at this moment pour out, send down the special blessing of heaven that you have ordained for this church and those we partner with.

And I mean like that. The place erupted into what sounded exactly like a National Geographic special. Like every animal voice in the jungle being recorded simultaneously.

I was driving the car. I almost spun off the road. I mean the hair on my neck just popped up.

Attention! In the name of the Lord we're listening to foolish carnality at best and doctrines of demons at worst. How could it be? This can't be happening. Jesus promised it would be like that.

It's not a popular promise. In a church world that no longer likes words like discernment, biblical evaluation. Acts 17.11 is almost gone from many leaders' Bibles.

You know, being Bereans. Measuring what's seen and heard by what God has said. In this day and age that's called negativism.

One of the great cultural sins is being negative. We live in a positivistic culture and the church has gone far out into the upper stratosphere realms of the power of positive thinking. If that's not big enough we'll go up 10,000 feet higher and get into possibility thinking.

Anything that sounds negative is assumed to be no good. Anything that sounds positive is assumed to be great. That is absolutely cultural, it is totally unbiblical.

The Bible is not a manual on being positive or negative. The Bible is God's revelation on what is true and untrue. What is of the spirit and of the flesh.

What is for eternity and what is only for time. Those are the categories of the scripture. And in every one of those categories you can find things that sound positive and things that sound negative.

Oh, this is an unpopular promise in a positivistic church world. But we need to hear it. Why? Because God has said it.

If he has said it, it's important. How about with us who maybe are living right in these days that were promised. If we hear the promise, let it shape our lives, you know what? We'll be watching out for deceiving spirits.

We'll be very carefully alert concerning deception. We won't think it crazy that doctrines inspired by demons might try to work their way in to the church world. Even the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unpopular promises, yes. Especially unpopular to those who are departing from the faith. But even to many who don't even want to be reminded that some will depart from the faith.

But again, like all the promises of God. If we'll receive them, if we'll believe them, they'll shape our lives. They'll sharpen our thinking.

They'll keep us alert and not slumbering. That doesn't mean we'll have to be nitpicky and everybody's wrong and only I'm right. No, here we go back to the flesh.

Flesh can come in every variety. From absolute compromising across the board toleration to letter of the law self-righteous. I'm the only one who ever said it right.

This promise will guard us from that. But keep us alert to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. Another promise regarding in times it's not popular.

2nd Timothy chapter 3. 2nd Timothy chapter 3. Verse 1 reads, but know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. They're promised. It's an absolute certainty.

It's not just a possibility, not just a likelihood. It's not, well, it just seems to be maybe drifting that way. It's an absolute promise from God.

In the last days, down toward the end of the church age, nearing the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, the times are going to get dangerous, perilous, very difficult to live in. It's not a popular promise. Especially when you see the basis of it.

Verse 2, for men will be. The reason it's going to get so tough in the last days is because men will be a certain way. The characterizations of humanity will just make it exceedingly tough.

Oh, this is unpopular. Why? Because we live in a world where things, to many observers, are getting better. Look, look, can't you see how much better they're getting? The blind are shouting out.

And the historians look and they cringe and go, I can't see it, you know. But we've got greater eyes now, not history, but new age thinking. We know how far we've come from ooze to apes to manhood.

But we're not done. That's just basic. We're ready to make a quantum leap into Godhood.

Things are getting better. Just hang on a few more days. We'll all be little gods.

And then the Lord says, know this, in the last days, perilous times will come. It's a promise, absolute certainty. It's elaborated upon in chapter 3, verse 13.

But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. There'll be evil men. There'll be imposters, pretenders.

And they'll just get worse and worse. They'll deceive all kinds of people. You know what? They'll end up deceived.

Some of them even saying that they're the Christ and maybe actually believing it. Unpopular promises, but God has made them. We can count on them.

Those promises should shape our view of the days we live in. Those promises can stir in our hearts a seeking of God that is earnest and true and real and growing. One more category before we end.

My goodness, how many unpopular categories of unpopular promises are there? Well, we're just taking a sampling. Thank you, Lord, for your mercy. But I guess in a way we kind of left the most unpopular for last.

Because no doubt none of us like to hear these either. Unpopular promises regarding difficulties for the godly. You know we want to be godly, right? Yes, amen.

Oh, yes, Lord. Number us among the godly. Make us like Christ.

Lord, we want to be mighty in spirit. Well, that's right on. But here are some wising, growing up, maturing promises that are not popular.

But they're true. John 15, 20. Jesus said, Remember the word that I said to you? A servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, and they did, they will also persecute you, and they shall. If they kept my word, and they didn't, they will keep your word, and they won't. You know? Amazing promise.

Stagger not at the promises of God. This is a promise. Important promise.

Not a fun promise. Not an exciting promise. But nonetheless important and nonetheless true.

Promise that the world and all of its systems, and especially religious leaders, as Jesus found out, will generally treat us like they treated Jesus. The world's systems won't naturally, rapidly, consistently, continually, eagerly appoint us a nominee for citizen of the year. The one to give all honor and claim.

If they persecuted Jesus, and they did, they will persecute us. Again, this does not excuse offending people needlessly. This is not a way to get a fleshy chip on our shoulder.

Well, the world's against me, I'll show them. No, vengeance is still mine, says the Lord. But it's a sobering promise.

It's a promise that though it's not fun to hear, it does prepare us for what we should expect. Does anyone like being rejected? Mocked? Ignored? Left off the invitation list to the big event? Well, those are just some of the multitude of forms of persecution. The Lord promises this is part of our portion in a sin-sick, fallen, dead, and dying world.

That already rejected Him, how can they be all that thrilled about you and me? Now that we follow Him. Doesn't mean we can't have joy. Doesn't mean we can't have peace.

Doesn't mean we can't bear fruit. Doesn't mean we can't bring in the sheaves of souls rescued. Doesn't mean that at all.

Those other promises are all still true. But it does mean there'll be plenty out there that aren't tickled and excited over you and me. And what's the big thing we've done wrong? We have followed the one they have rejected.

We proclaim the one who reminds them of their sin and guilt. We invite them to a cross that they want to ignore. Not a popular promise, but praise God.

God's not trying to make it cuddly, cozy, warm all the time. He's just trying to warn us, protect us, prepare us, grow us up, not let us be blindsided. Oh, well, I thought they were going to be thrilled to death.

Here I am. Preaching heaven and hell, you know. Praise God, some will rejoice when they hear it.

But some will target you the moment they hear it. That's what happened to Jesus. He's the way, we're following him.

We'll find it along the way, too. Acts 20, another unpopular promise. But absolutely true and absolutely important.

Acts 20, this promise given by God through the apostle. As he spoke to church leaders, those who wanted to be used of God. To equip the saints and prepare fruitful lives.

Acts 20, verse 29. For I know this, that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you. Not sparing the flock.

Also, from among yourselves, men will rise up, speaking perverse things. Why would they do that? To draw away the disciples after themselves. This promise has a two-fold aspect to it.

Promised trouble for the Lord's church. Some of the trouble coming from outsiders infiltrating into the church. Verse 29.

For I know this, that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you. Not sparing the flock. Through the 25 years the Lord let me pastor.

Before he sent me out these five years to travel and teach. I saw some of the reality of this promise. In the two flocks the Lord had me under shepherd.

Dallas and then in Irvine, California. Savage wolves from out there coming right in among us. Oh yeah, they've got that sheep's clothing on them, you know.

But strange teeth for sheep, you know. Rather than greet one another with a holy kiss, you know, they take a healthy bite. Trying to devour the flock.

It's not a popular promise. It's no fun to hear that. We need to hear it.

It's an absolute certainty. It will take place. What does it mean to us? Well, in light of this promise, brethren, let's have our eyes opened.

Not suspicious of everyone in every way, every day. Just alert. Just alert.

Knowing this is going to take place. Just ready. Not blasting away blindly and aimlessly and killing a hundred sheep and saying, well, at least I got one wolf, you know.

But knowing the reality of this promise, it's going to happen. But not just savage wolves out there coming in among us. In some ways, here's a more frightening aspect of this promise.

Carnal leaders rising right in our midst from within. Verse 30, also from among yourselves, the family of God. Men will rise up, get into prominence and leadership and influence, speaking perverse things, twisted things, misleading things.

Partly right, but enough wrong to be deadly. Maybe some healthy stuff, but just, you know, let's sprinkle that with arsenic. How much does it take? Not much.

Why would men do that? Because after their flesh, they want people to follow them instead of helping people follow Jesus. Why are we here in the church? To make disciples. What is a disciple? A follower of Jesus.

That's our calling and our ministry. Just worked out in different arenas. Many want people following them instead of helping people follow Jesus.

How do they do that? How can they accomplish that? Just teach something perverse, a little twisted. Oh, enough truth to catch the hungry, to catch the devout. And just twist it a bit and, ooh, Brother Jones.

Nobody said it like that before. Probably because it was wrong. Ooh, let's follow him.

Deadly. But we're promised this will take place. If we'll receive the promise, stand on that promise, our lives can be shaped and guarded and alerted.

One more, 2 Timothy 3.12. A dear brother in Dallas, Texas, one day told me this verse was haunting him. Let's read it and I'll tell you why he was bugged with it. This was a godly man, a fruitful man, a gifted evangelist.

He was an elder in the church there where I pastored a dear friend. Still is. 2 Timothy 3.12. Look at this promise.

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. You can count on it. Why don't we sing a chorus of standing on the promises? We can stand on this one.

We should desire to live godly in Christ Jesus. To be more and more like Christ, for the glory of Christ, to touch lives in His name. But here's the promise.

All who have that desire to live that way will suffer persecution. It's an absolute certainty. This brother in Texas told me, Bob, this verse is haunting me.

And I said, well, tell me. And he read the verse. I said, well, what's bothering you with it? He says, I think I desire to live godly, but I don't think I've ever been persecuted.

Praise God for a man that's serious about this promise. He took this promise at face value, as true as it is, and it shook him up. Well, I don't know if I really have that desire that I thought I did to live godly in Christ Jesus.

Why? Because I don't think I've ever been persecuted. It was interesting as we talked. I knew his life and ministry well.

It was kind of cute because this guy was so full of the Lord. He was so on fire for the gospel. He was so single-eyed, he didn't even notice the people giving him flack.

I comforted him that day. I reminded him of all the people that tried to hassle him through the years. He went away greatly blessed.

But really, that's the way to respond to these promises. Hey, this is real. This is not the Lord just kind of making an overstatement to get a point.

Our God speaks the truth. This is not a popular promise. Why? Because in our hearts we are drawn unto godliness.

And even as we're drawn, we hear the promise, all who desire to live that way shall suffer persecution. Gets us ready for it. No shock if it comes.

I remember the first time I faced severe opposition in ministry. I thought the whole kingdom of God had come apart. You know what that said about me? I didn't take promises like this seriously.

That was for the other people who didn't know how to be smooth. That's so fleshy. So carnal.

So doubting the promises of God. One place in conclusion for reflection, Ezekiel chapter 12. Ezekiel 12, verse 25.

For I am the Lord. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass. It will no more be postponed, for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it, says the Lord God.

Verse 28. Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord God, None of my words will be postponed any more, but the words which I speak will be done. Now outside of some of the contemporary application to the very day those words were spoken and time was up on some of these issues with Israel, here's the unending truth for every age and every promise of God.

God says the word which I speak will be done. There's no way around it. And why would we want a way around it? We want God's will, God's way, and God's timing.

Although these promises may not be exhilarating, exciting, and popular, nonetheless they are true. Our lives can be built on them and shaped by them, and may it be so in each of our lives. Let's pray together.

Lord, you know how the world cringes from these promises. You know how our flesh shrinks back. But, Lord, we want to stand on these promises, not because they're popular or unpopular, but just because they're true.

Thank you for speaking to us in a way that's not soft-soaping things, but gets right at reality. Lord, you're a great God, and again you show what a wonderful Father you are to even give us promises like these. By the work of your Spirit, may we humbly receive them, stand on them, be warned, shaped, and guided by them.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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