

God's Promises

by Charles Anderson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God's promises and understanding His ways, especially in times of doubt and difficulty.

Duration: 35:59

Scripture: Psalm 77:1

Topics: "Promises", "God's Faithfulness", "Trust in Trials"

Description

Charles Anderson emphasizes God's promises and faithfulness amidst trials, sharing experiences from his recent mission trip to South America where he encountered both the challenges faced by missionaries and the spiritual opposition they endure. He reflects on the importance of trusting God during difficult times, drawing parallels with the psalmist Asaph's struggles in Psalm 77, where he questions God's ways yet ultimately finds solace in remembering God's past faithfulness. Anderson encourages believers to seek God in both quiet moments and turbulent times, asserting that God's ways are revealed in the sanctuary and the sea, and that He is always at work, even when circumstances seem dire.

Transcript

Straighten out before the week is finished, but we have just come back from South America. Only, it doesn't seem possible that this time last week we were in Peru, and had been for a couple of weeks in Bolivia, where we had the opportunity of ministering to missionaries who were gathered in a conference there under the Gospel Missionary Union, and also with New Tribes Mission. It was a delight to be with these servants of God who are plunging into the jungles, in many instances, and reaching Indians or people who've never had a chance to hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always feel humbled in the presence of such noble men and women. But as usual, you know, we picked up a number of bugs and a bad cold, so I apologize at the very outset. Hope you will bear with me, and I'll get through.

If I get real rough, you can go to sleep. It's perfectly all right. Let me just ask for your prayers in passing.

The enemy is at work, as you well know, very arduously in opposing the advance of the gospel. We discovered when we got down to Bolivia, we ran direct smack dab into demon possessions such as I've never heard or experienced in my life before. It may be before this week is out, we will bring some messages from the word of God on this whole subject, which I think we ought to be aware of, and

especially since we're drawing nearer, I believe, to the coming of the Lord Jesus.

We may expect an eruption of demonic forces, I believe. Thank you, sir. And we ought not to be surprised nor overtaken, but one of the things that was most disturbing was that in Colombia, we really don't know who did it.

They're not making a direct claim, but two of the missionaries were kidnapped about three weeks ago, and they disappeared. Their wives and family have no idea where they are. They don't even know whether they're still alive, and the chances are they may not be.

And the people who have kidnapped them are probably the dope runners of Colombia, a powerful force in that country, and they have made the threat publicly that they're going to kill these two missionaries unless the United States releases the outstanding leader of the dope ring in Colombia who was extradited and tried and sentenced, I think, to life imprisonment here in our country, and they're demanding that he shall be released. And their threat is that for every month that he spends in prison, they will kidnap another missionary or an American and kill them. They'll go on, they said, doing this until at last the United States government bends and releases this criminal.

So, the enemy is hard at work. Not only so, but those who are missionaries under New Tribes mission are under fire as well from anthropologists of all people. Anthropologists come from our American universities, and they're claiming that missionaries are disturbing and upsetting and ruining the culture of the people.

And because this is true, they are enemies of the state, and they are being listened to by governmental authorities so that the missionaries who are working among Indian tribes back in the jungle areas are under fire. And it could well be that the government of Bolivia will forbid missionary activity among the Indians, which would be a great victory for the enemy, to be sure. But God's at work, too.

It's wonderful to see what the Lord is doing, and He is saving people, and there is a response to the gospel that's a very wonderful and encouraging thing. But we ought to pray for these servants of God. You know, the days of persecution, the days of opposition, the days of trouble are not over by a long shot.

New chapters of Fox's Book of Martyrs are being written every single day, and we need to pray most earnestly for God's servants who are working under fire, and I mean really under fire. The psalmists sometimes were almost brutally frank about what they thought about God. They didn't hesitate if they had some doubts concerning God's doings and God's ways in their lives to express it.

You know, I don't think it's wrong if, now and again, doubt assails us to express it. Do you ever doubt the things of God? Well, adjust your halo a little bit, because I can feel some of you saying, oh no, I never have doubted. Well, then you're not quite human, because it's just as human as it is to breathe, to now and again have some doubt.

Now, entertaining them and letting them grow becomes a wrong procedure, to be sure. But, now and again, when we talk to God in prayer, do you ever argue with God in prayer? I mean, claim his promises and demand that he do what he does, or says he'll do, and give him a, you know, argue with God a little bit? I think God wants that. He wants us to be absolutely honored with him, and the psalmists quite often were like that.

This particular psalmist, and I invite you to turn to the 77th psalm this morning. This is not one of David's psalms, but one written by Asaph. This psalmist had a problem, and he expresses it very frankly to God.

Let me read how he says it. I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice, and he gave ear unto me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord.

My sore ran in the night and ceased not. My soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled.

I complained. My spirit was overwhelmed. Then he inserts one of those little words, *philo*, there in the scriptures.

A little mysterious kind of a word, you know. Every time it's difficult today to have unison reading of scriptures in public, you know, because we have such a proliferation of translations. Somebody's got the Amplified, somebody's got the Undefried, somebody's got the Ossified, and somebody's got whatever, and it's difficult to get a congregation to be in unison.

I'm old-fashioned, you know. I believe I use, I mean, the King James Version because I'm convinced that the English section in heaven is going to be studying this book, and I want to be dead certain that when I get there I'm acquainted with the book because my hope is built on nothing less than rirish notes and moody press. I dare not trust the NIV, but wholly lean on KJV.

Now, I don't want to display too much of my ignorance in public. Indeed, there is a great deal of help and scholarship that's gone into some of the more modern translations, and in study I use them, but in the reading of the scriptures and in the kind of meditation that I delight in, I find myself resorting to the good old King James Version. But, I've noticed this, that when you ask for unison reading of the scriptures, whenever you hit that word *sela*, it's fascinating what happens in a congregation.

First of all, there are those who are the erudite, the spiritual eggheads. They know that that's a musical term, dummy. You're not supposed to read that, so they don't read it.

They go silent at that point. Then there are those on the other end of the spectrum who say, if it's in the bible, read it. Even if the commas are there, read the commas.

They're all inspired. I don't know what it means, but I read it anyhow. So, they come out in full force with a *sela*, and then there's always the folks in between who don't know whether they should or they shouldn't, and they falter a little bit.

It's fascinating to watch that. But, the psalmist does, three times in this psalm, insert that word, and I suppose the more popular interpretation of it is this. It is indeed, or probably was, a musical term indicating that the singers of the psalms should hesitate for a moment, or as we call it, a rest in music.

Parenthesis, perhaps. And so, it has been suggested that the word, you know, means think of that. Stop and think of that.

And so, he says over in this psalm, three times over, now just stop and think of this. I was in trouble. I remembered God, and I was troubled, and I was in an attitude of complaint.

I complained. My spirit was overwhelmed. Think of that, that that should be my experience.

Now, he goes on to say, thou holdest mine eyes waking. I'm so troubled I can't speak. I've considered the days of old, the years of ancient times.

I call to remembrance my song in the night. I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search. Now, six questions.

Will the Lord cast off forever? Will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Does his promise fail forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious, happy in anger, shut up his tender mercies? Think of that. If the answer to those questions is yes, that's a stunning thing. If it's no, ah, then that's a turn of events in his thinking.

But, he's troubled. Why is this psalmist troubled? Well, he's going through what might be called the agony of perplexity. He's perplexed about this one thing, God's ways of doing things.

Friends, I want to confess to you that I have never had a moment's problem with the will of God. Never. But, I have had some problems with the ways of God.

I don't question or doubt God's will. It's perfect, and he's perfect. But, I sometimes wonder, why does he have to do things the way he does them? Isn't there another way? Isn't there a different way? So, questions rise about the ways of God.

Now, you know, Habakkuk had the same problem. Have you read Habakkuk's book, or did you know he wrote one? Now, you'd better read it, because you might run into him in heaven, and he'll look at you and say, have you read my book? And, if we can blush in heaven, you'll have to blush by saying, did you write a book? And, he'll say, you carried it under your arm all through those years, and you never read it. Well, it's not a long book.

You can read it quite quickly. But, he had a problem. Habakkuk was troubled, and the problem that he had was quite similar to the problem the psalmist had.

You see, this was the heart of Habakkuk's problem. Babylon was the scourge of God to chastise Judah, and that bothered the prophet Habakkuk. It was not that Judah didn't deserve chastisement.

It did, and he never complained about that for a single moment. They deserved divine chastisement, but why did God have to use a wicked, pagan, godless Babylon to do it? Why couldn't he have chosen some other instrument? So, Habakkuk was enduring the agony of perplexity. God seemed unconcerned and silent, and why? Violence was abounding, lawlessness was rife.

Evils defied his prophets, and God seemed to be doing nothing about it, as if he didn't care. Then, Habakkuk was troubled about that, and finally, you know, he decided he'd better just be quiet and wait on God. So, he found a quiet place, and he waited on the Lord, and while he was waiting on God, God gave him the solution to his problem.

Two things. One, you have to learn, Habakkuk, that to just live by faith, not by sight. Trust me.

When you can't trace me, trust me. You have to live by faith. Even when God seems to be unconcerned, or God hasn't worked on your problem, still trust him, because the second thing you'll have to learn, Habakkuk, is that there will be ultimate victory, and it's mine.

I will have the final say, and there will be victory, and you'll rejoice in it, and so the book of Habakkuk ends on a note of great rejoicing, even though everything else failed. Yet, I'll leap for joy. Now, the psalmist here in the 77th Psalm, I say, has a similar problem, and so he now comes down to state, in verse 10, this is my

infirmity.

I'll remember the years of the right hand of the most high. I'll remember the works of the Lord. Surely I'll remember thy wonders of old.

I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings now. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary. And, there are two things the psalmist brings to mind here about the ways of God.

One is indicated in verse 13, the other is indicated in verse 19. Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. So, what Asaph is declaring here is that, if you want to unravel God's ways, you have to learn that the secrets are found in two places.

The place of stillness, and the place of a storm, because God reveals his ways to us in the sanctuary and in the sea. Now, I don't know whether he means when he says, thy way is in the sanctuary. I don't think he has to mean what we might rather commonly say is the sanctuary, namely a building, a church edifice.

We call it the sanctuary, to be sure, for various reasons. I'm not certain that the psalmist is here saying that God reveals his ways in a place where we meet together for worship, though I must say this. It is true that when we gather for worship, God does speak to us, and he speaks to us in so many multiple different ways that the sanctuary, the place of worship, does become the place where we learn something about the ways of God.

But, maybe in a broader sense, he's not referring to a place like that so much as he is a place of stillness, a place where we shut out the rest of this busy, feverish world of ours, and let God speak to us in the stillness and the quiet. That's hard to do in this mad 20th century in which we live, isn't it? We want noise. You go to New York City, and they got noise in the elevators.

I mean, they got to have music. There's something awfully embarrassing riding 25 floors with nothing but the breathing of your neighbor alongside of it, you know, so that's all covered up with a little bit of noise. We got to have music everywhere, or some kind of noise, and this is a feverish age indeed, but there has to be a place of stillness where God speaks to us.

Now, he declares that God's way is in the sanctuary. What happens when we get into that quiet place? Well, two or three things take place. First of all, there our vision is clarified concerning God.

We see him. See what he says? Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary. Who is so great a God as our God? Please note that we need to become occupied not only with the greatness of our God, but the goodness of God too.

The situation and the circumstances may not change very much, but we see God, and the result is that the fret, the frenzy, and the worry are all reduced, and we can better face the problems that we're wrestling with. Maybe you're in a place this morning where you've been pressured. You're carrying a load.

You're anxious about the future. You're anxious about a family situation that irritates, that troubles. You're anxious about your own health, whatever, and in our prayers we often ask God to change the circumstances, make me better, save my unsaved loved ones, give me security.

Wait a minute, maybe he won't change the circumstances much, but he will give you such a vision of himself and his ability to give you victory that you can cope with it. Not only cope, but conquer in the midst

of it. That's a high degree of spiritual attainment, but it may be the thing that God is drawing you toward at this moment.

In the place of quietness, the sanctuary, we see God. Also, there is where our understanding is corrected. Compare this psalm with another that you know, the 73rd psalm, where he talks about the mystery of successful wickedness as over against the suffering righteousness, and you remember he says, I was troubled.

Look, these wicked people, they have no trouble. Their kids are never sick. They're not plagued with plagues.

They're successful. They have more than the heart could wish. Their faces stand out with fatness, he says.

Rarely I've cleansed my hands in vain. It doesn't pay to be righteous, he says, until I went into the sanctuary, the quiet place. There, my understanding was corrected.

Then, I understood their end as compared to the end of the rightness, and it gets our thinking straightened out, you know. It's wonderful to know that. God may be drawing you this day into the place of quietness, in order that you may see God and have your understanding of him and his ways corrected a little bit, brought in line.

There's still another thing that happens when we are drawn to the place of stillness. There, we learn the faithfulness of our God. Did you notice how the psalmist puts it here? Thou art the God that doeth wonders.

He doesn't say that he's the God who has done wonders. Our God is not the great I was. He's the great I am.

He's at work all the time. Now, we don't always feel that way, you know. We don't always see that.

A little while back, I was in a hospital down there in Boca, and the surgeons gave me a bit of bad news. They said, it looks very much as though you have cancer of the stomach. Well, how do you take that? I don't know.

I always have dreaded it. Lord, how would I take it if that's what I knew? And so, I confess that I was a bit shaken, but I went to the hospital for this exploratory operation. It was a major surgery, and the operation was successful, but I developed an infection, a blood infection, that nearly took my life.

It was the first and only time that I felt that I wasn't going to come out alive. I was going to die, and they warned my wife and suggested that our boys be brought on because it didn't look too good, and they were having difficulty finding out what was wrong. While they're hunting, I'm going down, and I was hoping that they'd hurry up and find it, you know.

Now, in those days, I confess to you that I was having some problems spiritually. I thought, oh, the promises of God will come clear as a bell, and I began to do what maybe you have done from time to time when you're in difficulty. Let me see.

What kind of a promise shall I hunt for? Oh, there's a dandy. I wrote that down one time, but it doesn't seem to fit. Ever notice that? So, let me try another book, and so you flip a few more pages, and you read,

oh, I underlined that once.

Yeah, that's a dandy, but it doesn't seem to fit, and so you go flipping through the word, and I did that one morning until I couldn't find a single promise in the book that seemed to fit, and I began to say, God, have you forgotten your promises? As if he ever does. I may have forgotten them, but he didn't. They were there, but it was a low point.

I was discouraged, see? But then I began to learn something about the faithfulness of God, and a friend came in. When you're in the hospital, you have all kinds of friends. A lot of them you don't want.

They sit on your bed. They talk to you when you want to sleep. They pray interminably.

You know, all kinds of things, and I had a lot of friends come in, but this friend was very wise. He came in, and he said, when it gets real tough, brother, remember this passage of scripture, and he wrote it out on a piece of paper, and I don't know what I did with it, put it in my robe or stuck it on the side of the bed, but a whole day or so later I said, oh, I'm going to look up that promise, or that verse that my friend gave me, and I did, and here's what it said. Because thou shalt forget thy misery, oh man, was I in misery, and remember it as water that passes away, and thine age shall be clearer than the noonday.

Thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning, and thou shalt be secure, because there is hope. Yea, thou shalt dig about thee, and thou shalt take thy rest in safety. Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid, yea many shall make suit unto thee.

If ever a passage of scripture betoken the faithfulness of God, that one did. See, and for the first time, I didn't need a pill to go to sleep that night. I slept on that passage, because in the stillness of a hospital room, I was learning about God, my understanding of his ways was being corrected, and his faithfulness was coming to the surface just when I needed it.

So, God's way is in the sanctuary, but it's also, so the psalmist says here in the 77th Psalm, thy way is in the sea. That's a different thing. In the place of storm, in the place of difficulty.

You see, sometimes God leads us from the place of quietness, where he's had us alone for a little bit. He's been able to unfold himself to us in a very special way, and then immediately after that, his path of leading takes us to the sea, and the sea can be a stormy, trackless thing. God's way is always the way of faith.

He wants us to trust him. Brings us into the sanctuary, where we see him in faith, rest in his goodness and his greatness, and then he leads us to the edge of the sea, and indicates that the pathway of faith is directly through the sea. It was Annie Johnson Flint who wrote what you probably have read many times before, when she says, have you come to the Red Sea place in your life where, in spite of all you do, there's no way out, there's no way back, there's no other way but through.

Then wait on the Lord with a trust serene till the night of your fear is gone. He'll send the wind, he'll heap up the floods when he says to your soul, go on, and his hand will lead you through, clear through, ere the watery walls roll down. No foe can reach you, no wave can touch, no mightiest sea can drown.

The tossing billows may rear their crests, their foam at your feet may break, but over their bed you shall walk dry shod in the path that the Lord, your God, will make. Now, have you come to the Red Sea place in your life this morning? Then trust God, his way is out there in the sea. We live right within by car, a minute and a quarter from the sea, and nearly every day we drive by the ocean just to look at it.

Its moods change every day. Some days it looks like it's so angry it's going to wipe everything out, it's going to, it joshes itself against the shore. Other days it's still and quiet, they're almost like a lake, and other days it seems gentle.

The thing that I note is that there are no pathways through the sea. There are no markers saying this is the road to England. Take it, stay here, make two left turns, and you'll be in the British Isles.

No way. When you launch your boat into the sea, it's a trackless sea. You either have to have an instrument to guide you, or a captain aboard who knows it well.

Well, we have a captain aboard. He knows every inch of the way, even though we cannot discern the pathway, because his way is in the sea. See, and maybe you're going through the sea experience, this trusted friend, because you'll discover as he comes to the last verse of the psalm, thou lettest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

He leads every step of the way, and you can count on his leading. We have near our house up in the north, up in Jersey, New Jersey, where we lived for a long time, we have a little pond out there in a park, and we used to go out there and watch mothers and grandmothers bring their little kids out, and inevitably you'd see a little boy with a toy boat. He'd made it himself, got a stick, stuck it in a piece of wood, cut a sail, and he had himself a sailboat, and then he would tie a piece of string to the little thing, and push it out, let the wind pick it up, and oh, he was sailing a big schooner in his imagination.

Well, you know how boys are. They're adventurous, and so this one little fellow, he pushed his boat out as far as his string would go, and then he wanted it to go a little farther, and he got leaning forward, and the first thing you know, he either was going in the drink or let go of his string. He was so scared of falling in, he let go of the string, and the wind picked up that little boat and blew it out beyond his reach.

You never heard such howling, and yelling, and screaming in your life. What a disaster. It was like the sinking of the Titanic.

This little boat was gone, and then a couple of kids came along, older kids, and they saw the plight of this little fellow, and so one of them reached down and picked up two or three stones and began throwing them at his boat. That made this kid yell louder. These bullies are trying to sink my boat, and they kept throwing their stones, but a little while he noticed something.

He was sharp enough to notice this. Every one of those stones went a little bit farther than the boat, just a little bit beyond it, and created a wave, and the wave brought the boat a little closer, and these fellows were casting their stones not at the boat, but beyond it in order to bring it back within reach, and it wasn't very long before it was close enough that that little fellow could reach out, grab the string, and he had his boat back. Now, once in a while you and I may misinterpret God's ways.

Why is God throwing his stones at me? Why is God allowing this thing to go on so long that I've been afraid for? Why doesn't he find a way out? Why, why, why? Has he forgotten me? Has he forgotten this? You've got the same questions Asaph had in the psalm, but if you can trust him, the stones he seems to be throwing at you are not at you, but beyond you in order to draw you closer and closer and closer to himself. And so as you try to interpret God's ways, remember his way sometimes is in the place of stillness, the sanctuary, and sometimes in the place of storm. Maybe I speak this morning to someone who's not a true believer in Jesus Christ.

It isn't that you don't know about him. Why, you know as much as we do. You've heard about him for years, and you wouldn't be here if you weren't somewhat interested.

But, if you were brutally honest with yourself, you'd have to say, but I don't truly know him. And, you know, my life's a mess. Seems to be getting worse.

I can't find a way through and a way out. You never will until you find a God whose ways are in the sanctuary and in the sea. And, if you'll come to him this morning and commit your boat to him, take the string of life and put it in his hands.

Let him control you. You'll find peace and joy such as you never dreamed you'd have. And believer in Christ, don't doubt God this morning no matter how difficult the way may become.

He has you in mind. He hasn't forgotten you. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, when we read this book, we are reading thy thoughts toward us after thee. And, how precious are those thoughts. Every day they're fresh and new.

Great is thy faithfulness. And, we thank thee this morning for lessons we've learned, sometimes in a quiet still place, whether that be in the sanctuary where worshipers want to be made, or in the quiet of a hospital room, or a sickbed, or some other place. We thank thee for what we've learned there of thy ways.

We thank thee too that when in thy providence our ship must set sail on the trackless sea that lashes against us sometimes in fury that thy way is still in the sea. Thou hast not forgotten us. And, we thank thee for this this morning and pray that we may find fresh comfort and help in the words of the psalmist.

For the sake and in the name of the great Savior we ask. Amen.

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