

The Pilgrim's Staff

by Robert Murray M'Cheyne

God's promise to never leave or forsake us is a source of comfort and strength in times of need, and is rooted in His unchangeable character and everlasting love.

Scripture: Genesis 28:15, Joshua 1:5, 1 Chronicles 28:20, Psalm 51:11, Isaiah 49:15, Jeremiah 3:1, Matthew 28:20, Luke 10:42, Hebrews 13:5, Hebrews 13:8

Topics: "God's Promises", "Comfort in Trials"

Description

Robert Murray M'Cheyne emphasizes the profound promise of God, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' which serves as a steadfast support for believers throughout history. He traces this promise from its origins in the Old Testament, showing how it applies to all believers today, not just to specific individuals like Jacob or Joshua. M'Cheyne reassures that God's unchanging nature ensures that His promises are eternal and applicable to every believer, highlighting the importance of relying on this promise during times of guilt, danger, and loss. He encourages the congregation to remember that even in their darkest moments, God remains with them, offering comfort and strength. Ultimately, M'Cheyne concludes that this promise will be a source of solace even in eternity for those who believe.

Transcript

MY BELOVED FRIENDS, let us notice, in the first place, the history of this remarkable promise: 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' These words have been a staff in the hand of believers throughout all ages; and they will be so to you, if you lean upon them.

First of all, let us trace the history of this promise. You will notice that it is not put into this epistle for the first time--it is a borrowed promise. First of all, I think, it is borrowed from what God said to Jacob in Genesis 28:15: 'Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. 'There is another place from which I think it is borrowed: 'And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of a good courage, and do it; fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, even my God, will be with thee: He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee..., (1 Chronicles 28:20). Now you see, here is the promise again--'He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.' There is still another place where the same staff is put into a believer's hand: 'There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee' (Joshua 1: 5).

Now, turn back again to Hebrews, and observe how Paul brings it in: 'Be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee! Now, believer may ask this question: 'When did he say that to me? Ah! but he said it to Jacob, and Solomon, and Joshua, and therefore it is said to you. Observe, brethren, what a blessed principle this brings out: What God speaks to one believer, he says to me.

You will observe that this promise in the Old Testament is special, that is, it is addressed to one individual; but in the New Testament it is general. Some, when they read the Old Testament, say, 'This is addressed to Abraham', or 'This is addressed to Jacob; but it is not said to me'. But what was said to Abraham, or Jacob, or Joshua, is spoken to you. The special promise to Joshua is to all believing Joshuas to the end of the world--'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee!

I do not know if you understand what I mean; but from this little verse we know that the special promises in the Old Testament are to all believers. God said to Abraham: 'I will bless thee, and make thy name great and thou shalt be a blessing' (Genesis 12:2). So he says to all that are children of Abraham. And there is a sweet promise in the forty-third of Isaiah: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed thee: I have called thee by my name thou art mine...' (verse 1). That promise was special to Israel and yet it belongs to me. And there is another sweet promise in the fifty-fourth chapter: 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee ...' (verse 7). Now, if you were reading this promise, you might say, 'Ah that does not belong to me.' But by turning to the thirteenth of Hebrews, we know that it belongs to all believers.

There are two reasons I would give why this is true, because to some it may appear wonderful. The first is, God is the same yesterday, today and for ever--'I am the LORD; I change not' (Malachi 3:6). Ah! the unchangeableness of God explain it--'I am the LORD; I change not! Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever. And there is another reason why this promise of Scripture belongs to believers now; it is that all believers are one body, and therefore whatever belongs to one, belongs to all. All believers are branches of one vine; and therefore if God say to one branch, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee', he says so to all. And therefore, for these two reasons, all the promises made to Jacob or Solomon or Joshua are made to me. And this makes the Bible not a book written for one, but a book written to me--a letter by the Lord, and directed to me; and therefore every word of divine love and tenderness that he has written in this book belongs to me.

And now, dear brethren, I would speak in the second place, of the person here spoken of--'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' It is quite evident that it is not the language of a creature. Our parents will leave us, and our friends will leave us. These are not the words of a creature, then - 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Observe, then, dear brethren, I entreat you, whose word it is - 'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.'

You may take it as the word of Immanuel. You remember what Christ said to his disciples: 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Matthew 28:20). This is the same promise. Brethren, when the Lord Jesus comes to you, and covers you with his garment, and says, 'Fear not', he will never forsake that soul. A mother may forsake--'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that they should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee' (Isaiah 49:15). Observe, brethren, that when once the Lord Jesus comes to a sinner to be his righteousness, he will never leave him--'I am with you always.' Oh! it is this that makes him a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

Why will he never leave us? The first reason is, his love is everlasting love. It is not like the love of a creature--it is unchangeable. Another reason is, he has died for that soul: he has borne all for that soul. Will he ever leave a soul that he has died for?

Again, you may take these words as those of the Spirit, and then they are like those words in fourteenth of John: 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever' (verse 16)--to abide with you for ever. It is the same as these words--'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' When God the Holy Spirit comes to a soul, he will never leave it. Some may often be made to say, 'I think the Spirit will go away from me.' But, observe, he says, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' David cried out in the bitterness of his soul, 'Take not thy Holy Spirit away from me' (Psalm 51:11). Here is the answer--'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' God will never forsake the temple in which he dwells. He forsook the tabernacle in the wilderness, and he forsook the temple at Jerusalem; but he will never forsake the living temple.

Or, you may take these words, and apply them to God the Father. And here they come to be very much the words God gave to Abraham: he said, 'Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward' (Genesis 15: 1). He had returned from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and of the kings that were with him. The king of Sodom came out to meet him, and said unto him, 'Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.' But Abraham said, 'I have lifted up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and of earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich' (Genesis 14:21-23). And, immediately after, God appeared to him, and said: 'Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' This is what Asaph felt. He says, in the seventy-third Psalm, 'My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever' (verse 26). Ah, brethren, this is a sweet word to a poor soul who is mourning over the broken pots at his feet. This is a sweet word to those of you who are bereft--who have left houses and lands--'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' This may be a sweet word to those of you who are mourning over the dead. O brethren! is this your portion? Can you look up to a three-one God, Father, Son and Spirit, standing on these broken shreds at your feet, and say, 'Thou wilt never leave me, nor forsake me'? This is happiness. Well, well did the Lord say, 'Mary hath chosen that good part which shall never be taken away from her' (Luke 10:42). Ah, poor souls! that have chosen the world as your portion--that have chosen the portion that will be taken from you. Ah, brethren! be you wiser.

Let me mention now some of the times when we should remember these words.

A time of guilt. Oh the dark hour, when guilt is on the conscience, and when a frown looks down from heaven upon us. Oh in such an hour remember these words--'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return unto me' (Jeremiah 3:1). Thy redeeming God calls out, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today and for ever' (Hebrews 13: 8'). Thy redeeming God calls out, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' 'Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you' (Jeremiah 3:14). Oh there is a deceitfulness in sin! When Satan has got you down, he tries to make you think God has forsaken you.

A time of danger. There is no time when you may be more inclined to think God has forsaken you, than when sin and Satan are raging. There is a difference from sin raging and sin reigning, though the soul may not see it. In such a time, remember these words--'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' In a time of temptation, the believer should remember this promise. Jacob rested on it; Solomon rested on it: yea, it is a staff which has been leaned on by many believers, and you may lean on it too.

When creatures leave you. Some of you may be bereft of your substance, but remember, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' Some of you may be called upon--some have been called upon--to part with those who are dear to you. Some of you may be called upon to part with your teachers; but remember--and, Oh! it is hard to remember--that he that makes the creatures pleasant, still lives. Brethren, I do not know a lesson in the world that is harder to learn than this. It was God that gave me the creatures; and, now that he has taken them away, in himself I can find all that I had in them. Oh then! remember this--'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Bereavements come suddenly, they come like the whirlwind; but oh remember that he comes and says, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.'

And, oh brethren! remember that the word 'never' reaches to death--it reaches to the judgment seat. You may lay hold of that word there--'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' And when the judgment is past, these words will be the eternal solace of all those here who have believed--'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Eternity alone will unfold the riches of his promise. He who died for us will be our eternal friend; and he who sanctifies us will for ever dwell in us; and then God, who loved us, will be ever with us. Then will we get into the meaning of his promise-- 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Amen

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