

(Hebrews - Part 18): Most Sure in His Promise

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon highlights the unwavering nature of God's promises and the importance of trusting in His character.

Duration: 33:25

Scripture: Psalm 89:35

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers. The Holy Spirit never exhorts or invites without first providing information and teaching the truth. The sermon highlights the reliability of God's promises, which are sealed by blood and sworn to by God. The preacher encourages listeners to trust in God and have faith, reminding them that God's promises do not fail like human promises do. The sermon also mentions the concept of cities of refuge in Israel, where accidental killers could find safety from the avenger of blood.

Transcript

Now, in the book of Hebrews, the 6th chapter, in the book of Hebrews, the 6th chapter, verse 13 to the end. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. So after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. Which hope we have is an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil where the forerunner is for us entered.

Even Jesus made a High Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Now I have good news here for you from God that is so good and healing to the soul that it is better than any news from a far country, better than any news you could hear or read of anything happening in the world today. It is here by the Holy Spirit and it is for us.

The purpose of the Spirit here is to confirm the Hebrew Christians and us in the faith. The Holy Spirit is saying to us, this faith of Christ is worthy of your complete confidence. It is worthy of your loyalty and your ultimate committal.

He is saying to us that this faith of Jesus Christ rests upon the character of God. And this I should like to emphasize this morning, that our Christian hope rests upon the character of the Prime God. We are saved through the New Covenant.

If Christians could only keep that in mind, we are covenant persons. And we are certainly covenanters, as they were in Scotland years ago who took that name. We are covenanters, too.

We are saved through the New Covenant. God has made a pledge of his own free will, and a Christian is a Christian and remains a Christian because of a bond between the persons of the Godhead and the believing man. And God gives an assurance of never-ending goodwill.

Now, because what the Holy Spirit writes is better than anything that I can say, I want to read from the scriptures the covenant God makes with people. This is from the 89th Psalm, and it refers to David, but certainly you won't have listened or read more than a couple of verses until you see that it goes away beyond David. He is talking about another David's greater son, David's son and heir, Jesus Christ the Lord.

It is written, verse 19, Then thou speakest in vision to thine holy one, and saidest, I have laid help upon one that is mighty. I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David my servant, with my holy oil have I anointed him, with whom my hand shall be established, my arm also shall strengthen him, the enemy shall not exact upon him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him.

You will notice these are statements made by God about David and David's seed and David's people, and they are almost unconditional. God never makes any unconditional promises, but they are as near unconditional as they ever get. And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him.

And my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted. And I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. And he shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

And I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth, could be none other than Jesus. My mercy will I keep for him forevermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. That is, God's mercy through Jesus Christ, and the covenant which he made, is, are, though two of them, forevermore, and they stand fast.

His seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne is the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law and walk not in my judgments, if they break my statutes and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.

My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David." Now, that's what the Lord says in the 89th Psalm, and in the book of Isaiah he says this, "...for a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee,

saith the Lord thy Redeemer.

For this is as the waters of Noah unto me. For as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee nor guilty. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Now, those are the promises made by God which assure us of God's never-ending goodwill.

But I want you to see this, that all of these promises are of value only as we can establish the fact that the one who made them is worthy. A covenant is only as good as the character of the one who makes it. A promise is nothing in itself.

I've said that a number of times here, that a promise is nothing in itself. Its value depends upon the character of the one who made it. If you make a promise you can't keep, the promise is of no avail and of no value.

But if you make a promise with the intention of keeping it, and you can keep it, then it is a good promise because it rests upon a good character. So all the promises of God rest upon the character of God. That's why I keep teaching and insisting that we ought to know what kind of God God is.

We ought to search the scriptures and learn what kind of God we're dealing with so that faith will spring up normally and naturally. And we will know when we are listening to a promise uttered by God that that promise is absolutely trustworthy because the God who made it is trustworthy. Now there are reasons why covenants are sometimes made and later broken, or why they fail.

Let me give you some of the reasons. Sometimes a covenant is made and the person who makes it has no intention of keeping it, so it fails because of the duplicity of the promiser. I think that we would be very foolish, for instance, in the Western world if we entered into any kind of bargain with the Communists.

They do not intend to keep their promises only so long as it works for their favor, in their favor, but the moment that it works against them and works for the good of the other side, they will break it. They've done that, I wouldn't know how many times. I think if an effort were made, it could be found that something between 75 and 100 covenant promises have been broken by the Russians since the World War.

Now that means that a covenant is made and broken through the duplicity of the maker. He doesn't intend to keep it, so he makes it in order to gain something and breaks it as soon as he's gained it. But when it comes to God, I hardly need say that nothing like this could happen there.

And then another reason covenants sometimes fail is that the one who makes the covenant finds it impossible to fulfill it. The man makes a promise, but he finds he can't fulfill it. Things go bad for him, or physically or intellectually or financially, he's just unable to fulfill his promise.

So he fails through ignorance. He didn't know. He didn't know himself.

He didn't know his situation. He overestimated his ability, and therefore the promise fails. Or again, a covenant fails because the one who makes it changes his mind and cancels it afterward.

And so the covenant fails through the instability of the promisor. And then other times circumstances shift a little bit, and so people are unable to fulfill a promise that's made, and it fails through the weakness of

the promisor. Or a man makes a promise and then dies, and so it fails through the mortality of the promisor.

Now those are the five reasons why promises are made and broken. Why covenants between men and men, nations and nations, are sometimes wrenched violently apart. But God's covenant cannot fail, and we have the reason given for it, you see, in the passage which I read to you.

Among men an oath is an appeal to something greater. It is when a man wants to stand before a court and declare that he will tell the truth and the whole truth and nothing but the truth, he adds, so help me God. That's considered to be an oath.

And after that he's a perjurer if he tells a lie, because he has called upon somebody greater than himself to witness that he's telling the truth. And that's an oath among men. And men know their failures, and so they bind each other.

They know their tendency to lie. They've maybe not read what David said, that all men are liars, but they've had enough experience to know David was right, that generally speaking, until you become a Christian and stop lying and put away evil, that lying is quite a convenient scheme for getting along in the world. Men know it, and so they're not willing to have a man stand up and say, it's this way.

They say, now first put your hand up and place your other hand on the Bible and promise before all this court and before this judge, promise that you will tell the truth. Then call on God to witness that you're not going to lie. That's rather humorous.

I think they must chuckle in hell whenever a man gets up before a court and says, I promise before God I won't tell a lie. Well, why were you willing to tell it in the first place? That's the question I'd like to ask. Why is it? I'm always bothered when I hear a man that always has to appeal to somebody higher than himself for confirmation.

But when God wanted to humble himself and go along with our way of doing things, so he made a promise. And he made a promise to save his people. And when he made a promise, he started with Abraham.

And he couldn't call on anybody greater to confirm his statement. So he swore, and he could only swear by himself. For men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that but two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. So God made an oath. He swore an oath.

But it was not an oath. He did not appeal to an archangel. He appealed to somebody greater, and he looked about for a greater, and of course found none.

So he swore by himself, saying, By myself will I swear. So he did it for the heirs of the promise. We say to God, O God, what assurance do you give? What assurance do you give that Christ's death for us avails? What assurance do you give that the blood of Jesus secures our salvation? What assurance do you give that our place in thy love is unchanging? What assurance, O God, do you give that our faith in thy promises is secure? And God says, Well, I have nobody greater that I can call on.

I cannot raise my hand and call on some God greater than myself, because none greater exists. So I swear by myself that I will do these things, and that is an oath of confirmation. Now, it's just a question of who made that oath, who swore that oath.

There are many a man who swears an oath and then sits there and lies, because he hasn't got any character to start with. He not only will lie out of season, but he will swear and then lie in season, because he has no character. But because God is who he is, therefore we can trust God absolutely.

I'd like to have you people know this, that your hope for salvation, for forgiveness, for peace in death, and for hope for the life to come and heaven at last, does not rest on how you feel this morning. If it rested on how I felt this morning, I might as well pack up and start for the nether regions, because definitely I don't feel heavenly. Changing weather and hard work and so on.

But anyhow, your covenant, your hope, doesn't depend on how you feel. It depends on something else. It depends upon whether God's all right or not.

It depends upon when God makes a promise, you can trust God to keep it. It depends upon whether God is the one able to make good on his promises and keep his covenants. Now, let's look at it a little bit.

Take that word, holy. Holiness, that's one of the attributes of God. And because God is holy, God cannot lie.

It says over here, God that cannot lie, God willing to show the immutability of his covenant, in which it was impossible for God to lie. God can't lie. He can't lie.

There are some things I've told you that God can't do, even though that God is omnipotent. There are some things he can't do. God can't lie, because God is holy.

And to be holy, if he lied, he would have to violate his holiness. And God can't violate his holiness, and therefore God cannot lie. You say, since God cannot lie, does that mean that God is not omnipotent? The answer is that omnipotent is not the ability to do anything, it's the ability to do anything he wills to do.

And he doesn't will to lie. And he doesn't will to cheat nor deceive. He doesn't will to play false with his people.

God wills to be true to his children. So, they're holy. God is holy, and because he's holy, they're safe.

And then God's perfect in wisdom. Now, I could understand how God might conceive a scheme to redeem men, and he might get some of those men to agree with him and come his way and fall in with him and believe on his son. And then suddenly it would be found that God could not make good, because he had misjudged something.

I get a smile out of the fact that John Diefenbaker and Ike Eisenhower sat down down in Washington and put their two signatures to a treaty. And now it is not at all certain that Ottawa will confirm the treaty. And if that's the case, John and Ike will look at each other red-faced and say, well, we were honest men, but there's something turned up we didn't know about.

You see, that's that inability to forecast the future. Both men were honest men, and in the best of good faith they signed that treaty. Now, if it isn't confirmed by Congress, if it isn't confirmed by Parliament, it's dead.

But is that going to mean those two men anything wrong with them? No. It simply means that they were men, and being men, they weren't as wise as God, and they couldn't predict the future. And so their lack of wisdom would cause the covenant that they made to fail.

Well, there's no such thing with God. God knows everything that can be known, and when God makes a promise, God's able to make good on his promise because of who he is. He's perfect in wisdom, and he knows all the details.

You see, you come out of your house, and your driver gets into the car and turns the little button, and it goes, and doesn't start. Then you take a cab to church. Well, you see, the intentions were good, but we didn't know the battery was down, or it was cold, or had moisture in it, or it had post-nasal drip or something that was preventing the thing from starting.

We didn't know that. Now, that's good intentions, but it's lack of perfection in wisdom. So you change your mind because the thing you expected to work didn't work.

Now, again, omnipotence. If God were not omnipotent, God could not keep his covenant with me. If God were not omnipotent, I couldn't be sure that I would be saved.

I'm sure that I would be saved up to a point, but when God reached a point where somebody was stronger than he, then I'd be lost. But knowing that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, and knowing that omnipotence means God can do everything he wills to do, then I haven't any doubt at all, for I am in the arms of the Omnipotent God. Well, then again, suppose that God were in the habit of changing his mind.

I have met men, and I'm sure you have met people. They're always starting something new and then changing their mind about it. You see them one day in Chicago or St. Louis or Ottawa, and they're all red-faced and flushed and excited, they can hardly eat for talking, telling you about the new proposition.

And you shake your hand, wish them well, and see them two years later, and they say, Oh, that, that didn't go through. I wrote one time, I told you, from one city to another with a young man and his girlfriend. I was riding to catch a train after dedicating Bob Letourneau's conference grounds, and they were just going along for the ride.

I was the one who didn't belong in the back seat, but I had to be back there with them, and it was pretty terrible, pretty wonderful back there. I sat there and sort of looked around at the scenery passing by, and they sat there and didn't see the scenery. Well, about maybe five years later, I saw this young man, and he brought a girl up to me and said, Would you like to have you meet my wife? Big-mouthed me, I said, Oh, do I remember that? I said, I remember when we rode from Takoa to Atlanta, 90 miles in an August heat, and you two sitting in the back seat.

Oh, boy, I said, I remember that. He smiled and said, This isn't the girl. And I asked him how they were getting on on the foreign field, because they were missionaries.

But something had happened, you see. Somebody changed his mind, or her mind, I don't know which, or maybe both had just changed their mind. They were mutable, you see.

That's subject to change. But God, the immutable God, when he promised that his people would be kept and that we should be blessed forever and that his mercies would be upon us forever and that we could not perish, but he would keep us, God, the immutable God, doesn't change his mind about these things.

Well, then there's one more thing I have mentioned.

It is that covenants sometimes fail through the mortality of the promiser. A man makes a promise with all intentions of keeping it, and then grabs at his chest and tumbles over, and they take him off to the hospital, and in a few days he's gone. He meant all right.

He was wise enough to do it, and he was kind enough to want to do it, but he didn't live to do it. But when we talk about the covenant that keeps you and me, it is made and kept in being by the eternal God. So God cannot fail by cessation or discontinuance.

God, the eternal God, lives on, and because he lives on, we live on, and we'll live on as long as he lives on. Isn't this an awful thought, my brethren, that we're going to live as long as God? Isn't that an awful and a wonderful and an awesome thought, that we're going to live as long as God lives? We didn't begin when God began, because God never began, and we began. But as long as God, the eternal God, exists and continues to be, as long as God can say, I am and continue to be what I am, you and I will, in the grace of God, continue to be what we are, because we are saved by a covenant, you see.

And that covenant is sworn to by an oath. God Almighty confirmed his oath by two immutable things. We might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

Now, those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament know what that passage, fled for refuge, means. You remember they had six cities in Israel in olden days, and those cities were the cities of refuge. And when a man accidentally killed another man, suppose it says that they're working together with axes, and the head flies off of an axe and strikes another man on the head and kills him.

Now, there was a law in Israel that said the avenger of blood, that would be the nearest of kin, the next brother or the father or the next relative of the dead man, could take vengeance on this fellow. I'm working away and suddenly as I strike, the head flies off of my axe and kills a man. Well, his nearest male relative had a right under Jewish law to take out after me, and when he found me, kill me for having killed his brother.

But of course, it wouldn't have been a just thing to do, so they had a city of refuge. And the fellow that had the accident looked at his road map real quick and said, What's the shortest way to the nearest city? And off he took. As fast as his legs would carry him, racing to the city of refuge.

And sometimes he barely made it in with his tongue hanging out, panting like a tired dog. And the fellow just behind him, just within reach of the back of his neck, but he didn't quite make it, he raced in. And then the court trial took place, and they decided whether the man was to blame or not.

If he was not to blame, and of course the fellow couldn't take vengeance, because to do so would be to violate the law again, and he would be the murderer. That was the city of refuge. They had six of them throughout Israel.

And the man of God that wrote this by the Holy Ghost's inspiration, being a Jew, knew all about that. So he said, You have fled for refuge to lay a hold upon the hopes that are before you. Here we Christians are.

And whether a man was guilty or not, he had a right to fly to that city of refuge. If he wasn't guilty, it was proved not so. If he was guilty, he still had a right to go to the city of refuge, and if he made it to the city of refuge before they got to him, he was safe.

And the man of God says, You have fled for refuge, and I can just see myself with the devil one hot jump behind me, racing for the cross of Jesus, racing for Calvary's holy mountain. And I find that at last, and just as I race in, the door is let down and the devil runs head on into the door and bounces off, but he doesn't get me, because I have found the refuge and I am safe. Which hope, he says, we have as an anchor of the soul.

It's strange how they change figures of speech. Brother Gray, when you studied in theological schools, they told you not to change figures of speech like that, didn't they? But I'm so glad the writer to the Hebrews didn't go to Bible school. He would have been so badly off if he had.

So he changed his figure of speech, and he says, Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul. Now he's got him running to the city of refuge, and suddenly he becomes an anchor of the soul without taking his breath. Now we have a ship, and we have a storm, and we have the saints of God on board the ship.

And somebody says, Well, what I see coming up out here, that typhoon, I think we're all dead. I think we're all sunk, because we'll be blown on the rocks. Somebody says, Look down there, look down.

You look down and try to see the anchor, but it's too far down. But your anchor grips the rock, and the ship is all right, and it outrides the storm. The anchor is there, but you don't see it.

So said the Holy Ghost, We have an anchor that keeps the soul steadfast and sure while the billows roll. And that anchor we don't see, but he's there. And he's there, having entered in within the veil.

But the forerunner is for us entered. What does he mean by the forerunner entering in for us? Well, he means that where Jesus is now, we're going to be. That's what he means.

Where Jesus is now, we're going to be. He's the forerunner, he went first for us. And we're coming along after him, and where he is there, we're going to be.

Who is this forerunner? Why, it's even Jesus, who was made a high priest forever. And high priests kept dying in olden times, but this high priest has life forevermore after the order of Melchizedek. So, says the Spirit, go on, keep on believing.

You're not mistaken in fleeing to Christ. Our hope is sure, and our consolation is strong, and our forerunner has already entered. And the anchor grips the rock, and everything is all right in our Father's house.

So arouse you, pursue holiness, be not slothful, but follow those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Show diligence and full assurance of hope unto the end. Lots of preachers are what they call inspirational preachers.

They get up and don't give you one bit of truth, or any fact at all to go on, but they just keep needling you, just keep putting the harpoon in you all the time. They don't give you any reason for it, but the Holy Spirit never made that mistake. He never exhorts until he has informed.

He never gives the invitation until he has taught the truth. So it is here. He first lays before us one glorious, everlasting covenant, sealed by blood and sworn to by God, and promised by the God who cannot lie.

Then it says, Because this is true, therefore show diligence, be not slothful, but follow them who through faith and patience inherit the promise. Everything is all right on God's side, and because everything is all

right on God's side, everything will be all right on your side if you'll only trust. Have faith, believe, dare to believe, put yourself in his hands, for he is where you are going.

And because he is where he is, you are going where you are going. You are saved by an oath of Almighty God. God, because he could not appeal to a higher court, appealed to himself and said, Surely blessing I will bless, saving I will save, and keeping I will keep.

We Christians ought to be the most delighted, happy people in the world. Strange how we aren't. I know why we aren't, though.

The devil is out after us, the flesh is out after us, and the world is out after us. In fighting these three enemies, sometimes we don't have time to be happy. We don't have time to remember that we're as safe in the arms of Jesus as if we'd been in heaven for a thousand years, if we'll only believe and go on, and not disgrace ourselves in the kingdom of God by turning back to the beggarly elements of the world.

But I don't think you will, for I am persuaded better things of you, my brethren, and things that accompany salvation, will with us speak.

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