



PROMISES FOR THE RIGHTEOUS

Penn Clark

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By Penn Clark

My computer was broken so I took it to a computer store to get it fixed. The harried owner of the shop assured me it would be fixed by the end of the day. When I returned, I could see by the look on his face that he had not gotten to it yet. I was frustrated by this, but he was apologetic and said if I could stay a little while longer he would fix it while I waited. He locked up the store, which left just the two of us in there alone. We chatted as he unscrewed the case, but then he stopped and said, "There is something about you. You are different. What is it?" I shrugged, not sure what to say. As he persisted, it occurred to me that the whole thing had been set up by the Lord as an opportunity to witness to this man. All the frustration left me. I told him that I was a born-again Christian. He said, "I knew it. You're one of the good guys." But when I asked about his faith, he refused to tell me anything. He said, "If I tell you about my church affiliation, you will hate me. It always happens that way." I withdrew from the conversation momentarily and prayed within my heart, asking the Lord what the man's religion was. He said, "He is a Mormon." When I relayed this to the man, he braced himself for some rejection or contention. He said that was what born-again Christians always did when they found out he was a Mormon.

What he didn't know was that the Lord had been working in me to love Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses, even though I disagreed with what they taught, passing themselves off as a Christian Church. My contempt for them had not been very effective in winning any to Christ, so I was trying to walk in love towards them, however, which was starting to produce results. The Lord had given me a new compassion for them, which I felt welling up in my heart for this man. He must have felt this too because he let his guard down. He began by admitting he had doubts about the authenticity of Mormonism. Then he set his tools aside and opened his heart up even more. I will never forget what he said next. He said, "Penn, my wife and I were both virgins when we married. Alcohol has never touched my lips. I have never even held a cigarette. I never miss saying my prayers each day and reading my devotional. I always read and pray with my kids each night before bed. I more than tithe and I'm as involved in my church as I can be. I keep all the rules, but I don't feel righteous. A look of deep longing came over his face. The man was starving for a sense of righteousness. Even though he was "doing everything right", he couldn't figure out why it always alluded him. In that moment, it occurred to me that I felt right with God, and said so, but had taken it for granted, supposing that that it was normal. When I saw what it looked like to hunger and thirst for righteousness, I became aware of how special it was to the human heart. I never thought of righteousness the same way again after that conversation.

Since then, I have met other people who longed for righteousness, from Amish to atheists. There are those who live by a certain code or creed, trying to do what they have been told to do, in order to become righteous, but never feeling right with God. This brings us to a great truth, which is that no one can ever do enough to be right with God. It doesn't come that way. God knows this, and uses this need to bring us to the free gift that comes through Jesus Christ alone. It is Him, not church membership, rule-keeping or observing religious regulations.

What makes all of this confusing is there are some things the Lord requires of us that constitute righteous acts. For example, Jesus was baptized, but He didn't do it because He was a sinner, practicing unrighteousness, but because God required it of everyone living in Israel:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. (Matthew 3:13-15)

In other words, there are some things we need to do because God requires it, "to fulfill all righteousness".

Any time we do what pleases the Lord, we get some sense of righteousness from it, but this alone is not enough to satisfy our need. The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that if they gave an offering to the poor, it would add to their righteousness. He wrote:

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

This does not mean that Paul believed it would fulfill all of their need to be right with God. Giving is a good thing to do, the right way to live, but you can never give enough to satisfy your need to be right with God. It doesn't come by doing, it comes by believing.

Here is what Paul taught about his own pursuit of righteousness in Philippians 3:7-11:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

I think it is like being a tight rope walker on a high wire. The thrill is in walking the narrow walk between the two towers, which pleases those who are watching, yet if you fall there is a net below. Some religious groups imply that there is no net. If you sin, it is over for you. You only

get one chance. If you happen to sin certain sins, God is done with you. Then there are those who spend all their time laying in the net, feeling that God loves them no matter what they do, so why not just rest in His grace. To me, both are wrong. I happen to think that we need to experience both in order to be fulfilled. I believe we need to walk the narrow walk, going the distance, which pleases the One who is watching. Yet, if we fall, we fall into His everlasting arms; His grace will be there for us, but He expects us to get back up and keep walking. You can see this in the book of Proverbs, where it says, "*A righteous person may fall seven times, (continually) but he gets up again.*" (Proverbs 24:16, GWT)

Another way of seeing this is that I am made righteous by God by faith and it makes me want to do righteous things. If I fail in the attempt to do what is right, I am covered by His garment of righteousness while I am getting back up to walk again.

This gift of righteousness is useful in shutting down condemnation, which the enemy uses to keep me down when I fall. If I did not have a breastplate of righteousness available, I likely would never be able to recover by doing enough on my own. I need both.

WHAT DEFINES THE RIGHTEOUS?

All through the Psalms and into the book of Proverbs, the righteous are always held in contrast to the wicked. As we read, we get a sense of the nature and behavior of both. Here are a few verses in Scripture that help define a righteous person:

INTEGRITY *The righteous man walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him.* (Proverbs 20:7)

GENEROSITY *He covets greedily all day long, but the righteous gives and does not spare.* (Proverbs 21:26)

BOLDNESS *The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.* (Proverbs 28:1)

GIVING *The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives.* (Psalms 37:21)

JUSTICE *The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is in his heart; None of his steps shall slide.* (Psalm 37:30-31)

WORSHIP

*Let God arise,
Let His enemies be scattered;
Let those also who hate Him flee before Him.
As smoke is driven away,
So drive them away;*

*As wax melts before the fire,
So let the wicked perish at the presence of God.
But let the righteous be glad;
Let them rejoice before God;
Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly. (Psalms 68:1-3)*

FELLOWSHIP Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with You? They gather together against the life of the righteous, and condemn innocent blood. But the Lord has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge. He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; The Lord our God shall cut them off. (Psalms 94:20-23)

LIGHT

Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. (Psalms 97:11-12)

HONOR

The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance. (Psalms 112:6)

VICTORY

The voice of rejoicing and salvation Is in the tents of the righteous; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. (Psalms 118:15)

ACCESS

Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter. (Psalms 118:19-20)

THE AUTHORITY OF THE KINGDOM

There is a story in the book of Esther about the Queen coming before the King. She knew that if she approached the throne without him extending his scepter towards her, she would die in an instant at the hands of his bodyguards. Esther understood this protocol but had to see the king right away. She said:

"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days." (Esther 4:10-11)

Esther decided to break this protocol in order to approach the throne with an urgent concern, which could save her people, the Jews. The King graciously extended the scepter in her direction, sparing her life. (Esther 5:1-3)

Something like this happens when we pray. God extends His scepter toward us, allowing access to Him. According to Psalm 45:4, the scepter of His kingdom is righteousness,

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. (Psalm 45:4)

This means those who are righteous can come before Him anytime, with any need or petition that we desire. However, this righteousness did not come because we did everything right; it came because Jesus did everything right:

But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions." (Hebrews 1:8-9)

It took faith for me to begin accepting the gift of righteousness which came from Jesus alone, rather than my own attempt at doing everything right. It is easier to do than to simply believe, but in the end, it is the only thing that makes us right in the sight of God:

For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17)

This sense of being right with God allows us to have boldness in prayer. "The prayer of the righteous man avails much". (James. 5:16, KJV)

While I have chosen to accept God's terms for righteousness, I often feel condemned for not doing everything right. Recently again, I was feeling condemned, so I used my ability to meditate, imagining myself to be clothed in a pure white robe which came from Jesus. This gave me the freedom to begin praying again, which was something I had been lacking in myself.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The enemy is always condemning me, making me feel unacceptable to God, telling me I am not a good Christian, reminding me of things I have done wrong. Sometimes the only way to stop this is to declare out loud that I am righteous, not because I have done everything right, but because Jesus has. This acts like a breastplate, which is part of the armor of God.

Stand therefore... having put on the breastplate of righteousness... (Ephesians 6:14)

This comes from Isaiah 58:16-17:

And he saw that there was no man,

*and wondered that there was no intercessor:
therefore his arm brought salvation unto him;
and his righteousness, it sustained him.
For he put on righteousness as a breastplate,
and an helmet of salvation upon his head;
and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing,
and was clad with zeal as a cloak.*

We can only stand, clothed in the armor of righteousness (2 Corinthians 6:7). In a sense, we are putting on the Lord Jesus Himself, as we approach the Father (Romans 13:14).

GOD'S ESTIMATION OF OUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS

As for our own attempt at being right with God, His estimation of it is very poor:

Hear my prayer, O Lord, Give ear to my supplications! In Your faithfulness answer me, and in Your righteousness. Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous. (Psalm 143:1-2)

But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; (Romans 3:10)

REWARDS FOR THE RIGHTEOUS

There is a reward for choosing to live right with God and man, both in this life and the life to come:

So that men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; Surely He is God who judges in the earth." (Psalm 58:11)

We can get a glimpse of these rewards in some of the promises God makes to the righteous.

PROMISES FOR THE RIGHTEOUS IN PSALMS

Here are some promises for the righteous, which you can stand upon by faith. Not only will this reinforce your desire for righteousness, but it will help you decide if you are righteous or wicked. There are only two camps. Which one are you in?

For the Lord watches over all the plans and paths of godly men, but the paths of the godless lead to doom. (Psalms 1:6, TLB)

For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a shield. (Psalms 5:12)

But the Lord is still in his holy temple; he still rules from heaven. He closely watches everything that happens here on earth. He puts the righteous and the wicked to the test; he hates those loving violence. (Psalms 11:4-5, TLB)

For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright. (Psalms 11:7)

He renews my soul. He guides me along the paths of righteousness for the sake of his name. (Psalm 23:3)

Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous. (Psalms 31:18)

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. (Psalms 34:15-17)

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. (Psalms 34:19)

Calamity will surely overtake the wicked; heavy penalties are meted out to those who hate the good (the righteous). But as for those who serve the Lord, he will redeem them; everyone who takes refuge in him will be freely pardoned. (Psalms 34:21-22, TLB)

A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous. (Psalms 37:21)

I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed. (Psalms 37:25-26)

The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell in it forever. (Psalms 37:29)

The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him. The Lord will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged. (Psalms 37:32-33)

Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; For the future of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; The future of the wicked shall be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them; He

shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him. (Psalms 37:37-40)

The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and trust in Him. And all the upright in heart shall glory. (Psalms 64:10)

"All the horns (authority, strength, and influence) of the wicked I will also cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted." (Psalms 75:10)

The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. (Psalms 92:12-15)

Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. (Psalms 112:3-4)

Revive me, O Lord, for Your name's sake! For Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble. (Psalm 143:11)

PROMISES FOR THE RIGHTEOUS IN PROVERBS

The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe. (Proverbs 18:10)

The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but He casts away the desire of the wicked. (Proverbs 10:3)

But the righteous has a refuge in his death. (Proverbs 14:32)

But He hears the prayer of the righteous. (Proverbs 15:29)

The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the unfaithful for the upright. (Proverbs 21:18)

The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor and life. (Proverbs 22:4)

Do not lie in wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; do not plunder his resting place; (Proverbs 24:15)

PROMISES FOR THE UPRIGHT

To be upright means to do what is right before God and man. Usually, it involves living a principled life, with certain standards that you don't veer from. For example, Job was considered to be an upright man who feared God and shunned evil (Job 1:8).

Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just; For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds. My defense is of God, who saves the upright in heart. (Psalms 7:9-10)

For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright. (Psalms 7:11)

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. (Psalms 33:1)

He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; (Proverbs 2:7)

For the upright will dwell in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; But the wicked will be cut off from the earth, and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it. (Proverbs 2:21-22)

For the perverse person is an abomination to the Lord, but His secret counsel is with the upright. (Proverbs 3:32)

The way of the Lord is strength for the upright, but destruction will come to the workers of iniquity. (Proverbs 10:29)

The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them. (Proverbs 11:3)

The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the unfaithful will be caught by their lust. (Proverbs 11:6)

By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. (Proverbs 11:11)

Fools mock at sin, but among the upright there is favor. (Proverbs 14:9)

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. (Proverbs 15:8)

The way of the lazy man is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright is a highway. (Proverbs 15:19)

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who keeps his way preserves his soul. (Proverbs 16:17)

An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, and he who is upright in the way is an abomination to the wicked. (Proverbs 29:27)

The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright— words of truth. (Ecclesiastes 12:10)

HAVING HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS OUR GOAL

Paul had a list of goals that he was shooting for. He itemized them in what turned out to be the last letter he wrote. I think this list is what motivated him to the end. This is what motivates someone who has done everything this life has to offer. Let's take another look at what he wrote in Philippians 3:7-11:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Jesus said it succinctly: Make righteousness our priority:

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:33)

There is a strong connection between being righteous and having the fear of the Lord:

*They shall fear You
As long as the sun and moon endure,
Throughout all generations.
He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing,
Like showers that water the earth.
In His days the righteous shall flourish,
And abundance of peace,
Until the moon is no more. (Psalm 72:5-7)*

As for the Mormon in the computer shop, I only saw him a couple of times again after that day, and he was always too busy to talk. I never got to lead him to the Lord as I had hoped, and he went out of business. However, I have become more effective in leading other Mormons out and into a new life after that. I also have some ex-Mormon friends who are very effective in their witness to other Mormons. They agree that love is the key.

I never forgot my conversation with that man in the backroom that day and am trusting that he didn't either. I will never forget seeing someone starving for righteousness, something I had taken for granted for so long. It became a new word for me and has helped me in my work with other people who want to be free from the endless cycle of legalism.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

You should read the book of Romans, which is the story of the fall of man, the human condition, our great need, and how that was met by the sacrificial work of Jesus on the Cross. It does much to lay out how righteousness comes and our futile attempt to accomplish it on our own.

This little study comes from a larger discipleship study guide called *The Foundation*, which includes other important concepts we need to build underneath our Christian lives.

A great book by ex-Mormon friends of mine is *Passport to Heaven: The True Story of a Zealous Mormon Missionary Who Discovers the Jesus He Never Knew*

Another great book is: *Unveiling Grace: The Story of How We Found Our Way out of the Mormon Church*

My booklet on the promises to those who fear the Lord would be helpful.

CREDITS

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