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**Are God's New Testament Promises Assuring
Final Redemption Ultimately Contingent upon
Human Obedience?**

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It is my intention in this article to use some of the New Testament texts to show that the promises assuring final redemption are ultimately dependent/contingent upon human obedience. I do not in any way claim that I have exhausted all the passages involved, but I have just taken these few passages as pointer to the topic. There are yet other numerous passages that one can explore, in all they still point to the same sense of obedience as the conditions for the fulfillment of the promises.

Introduction

The Christian servant must never forget that salvation is God's idea, not men therefore, it has an unfathomable depth. Salvation is the great thought of God, not experience. Experience is simply the door through which salvation comes into the conscious level of our life so that we are aware of what has taken place on a much deeper level.

Biblical faith is based upon the promises of God in Israel's history and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. But the New Testament

itself promises a fulfillment in the future. The Hebrews never lost their original nomadic sense of the horizon which must always be sought, even after they had settled in Canaan. Nomadic religion is a religion of Promise. There was always the promise of something new to look forward to; a new Exodus, a new Covenant, a new David, a new Zion. So in Christian faith, though all the promises of God are fulfilled in Christ (II Cor. 1:20), there is still a horizon; Christ's resurrection is a promise as well as fulfillment. The New Testament itself foreshadows a new theology of history; the future is the future of Christ; its purpose is mission. Some contemporary theologians following Bultmann have demythologized the Christian hope, so that it has lost its sense of the goal of history; they speak merely of the goal of the individual believer; eschatology is only a way of describing the existentialist liberation from history. Others (notably Jurgen Moltmann, who sets forth a theology for today based upon hope) are seeking to recover the biblical sense of promise and fulfillment in the historical future, which is the future of Christ's unfinished mission

Philippians 4:6-7

God has given us promises that we can rely on when we are in need of comfort and assurance. These promises were made by a loving Heavenly Father and it is very comforting to know that God loves us and He always keeps His promises. When praying to the Father, take His promise before Him. Paul writing to the Philippians says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

For the Philippians life was bound to be a worrying thing. Even to be a human being and so to be vulnerable to all the chances and the changes of this mortal life is in itself a worrying thing; and in the Early Church, to the normal worry of the human situation there was added the worry of being a Christian which meant taking one's life in one's hands. Paul's solution is prayer.

Paul stresses that we can take everything to God in prayer. There is nothing too great for God's power and nothing too small for his fatherly care. A child may take anything, great or small to a parent, sure that whatever happens to him is of interest there, we in exactly

the same way take anything to God, sure of his interest and concern. We can bring our prayers our supplications and our requests to God, we can pray for ourselves, we can pray for forgiveness of the past, for the things we need in the present and for help and guidance for the future. We can take our own past, present and future into the presence of God. We can pray for others. We can commend to God's care those near and far who are within our memories and our heart, all because he had promised he cares for us - "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1Pet. 57), provided we obey to cast them on him.

Paul lays it down that thanksgiving must be the universal accompaniment of Prayer. The Christian must feel as it has been put, that all his life he is as it were, suspended between past and present blessings. Every prayer must surely include thanks for the great privilege of prayer itself. Paul insists that we must give thanks in everything, in sorrow and in joy alike. That implies gratitude and perfect submission to the will of God. It is only when we are fully convinced that God is working all things together for good that we can really feel to him the perfect gratitude which believing prayer demands.

When we pray, we must remember three things. We must remember the love of God, which ever desires only what, is best for us. We must remember the wisdom of God, which alone knows what is best for us. We must remember the power of God, which alone can bring to pass that which is best for us. He who prays with a perfect trust in the love, wisdom and power of God will find God's peace.

The result of believing prayer is that the peace of God will stand like a sentinel on a guard upon our hearts. The word that Paul uses (phrourein) is the military word for standing on guard. The peace of God, says Paul, as the Revised Standard Version has it, "passes all understanding", does not mean that the peace of God is such a mystery that man's mind cannot understand it, although that also is true, but it means that the peace of God is so precious that man's mind, with all its skill and all its knowledge, can never produce it. It can never be man's contriving, it is only God's giving. The way to peace is in prayer to entrust ourselves and all whom we hold dear to the loving hands of God.

Matthew 11:29

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mtt. 11:29). Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders. The Jews used the phrase ‘the yoke for entering into submission in’. They spoke of the yoke of the Law, the yoke of the commandments, the yoke of the Kingdom, the yoke of God. But it may well be that Jesus took the words of his invitation from something much nearer than that.

He says in verse 30, ‘For my yoke is easy and my burden is light’. The word easy in Greek is ‘chrestos’ which can mean ‘well-fitting’. In Palestine ox yokes were made of wood, the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and not gall the neck of the patient beast. The yoke was tailor made to fit the ox.

There is a legend that Jesus made the best ox yoke in all Galilee, and that from all over the country men came to him to buy the best yokes that skill could make. In those days, as now, shops had their signs above the door; and it has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter’s shop in Nazareth may well have been, ‘my yoke fits well’. It may well be that Jesus is here using a picture from the carpenter’s shop in Nazareth where he had worked throughout the silent years.

Jesus says, “My yoke fits well”: what he means is, “The life I give you is not a burden to gall you; your task is made to measure to fit you: Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly. He also says, “My burden I light”. As a Rabbi had it, “My burden is become my song”. It is not that the burden is easy to carry; but it is laid on us in love; it is meant to be carried in love; and love makes even the heaviest burden light. When we remember the love of God, when we know that our burden is to love God and to love man, then the burden becomes a song. There is an old story which tells how a man came upon a little boy carrying a smaller boy, who was lame upon his back. “That is a heavy burden for you to carry” said the man. “That is not a burden”, came the answer, “That is my wee brother”. The burden which is given in love and carried in love is always light.

Promise of Glory – The Return of Jesus Christ Jn 14: 1-3

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms, if it were not so, I would have told you, I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you be with me that you also may be where I am”.

In a very short life for the disciples was going to fall in. Their world was going to collapse into chaos around them. At such a time there was only one thing to do – stubbornly to hold on to trust in God. As the Psalmist had had it, “I am still confident of this; I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord” (Ps. 27:13-14).

“But my eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign Lord; in you I take refuge – do not give me over to death. Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evil doers. Let the wicked fall into their own nets while I pass by in safety “(Ps. 141:8-10).

There comes a time when we have to believe where we cannot prove and to accept where we cannot understand. If in the darkest hour, we believe that somehow there is a purpose in life and that that purpose is love, even the unbearable becomes bearable and even in the darkest there is a glimmer of light.

Jesus adds something to that, He says not only trust in God, he says also, “Trust in me”. If the Psalmist could believe in the ultimate goodness of God, how much can we. For Jesus is the proof that God is willing to give us everything he has to give. As Paul puts it, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things (Rom. 8:32). If we believe that in Christ we see the picture of God, then, in face of that amazing love, it becomes, not easy, but at least possible, to accept even what we cannot understand, and in the storms of life to retain a faith that is serene.

Jesus went on to say, “In my Father’s house are many rooms”. By His Father’s house he meant heaven. But what did he mean when he said there were many rooms in heaven? The word used for ‘rooms’ is the word ‘monai’ and there are three suggestions: -

(i). The Jews held that in heaven there were different grades of blessedness which would be given to men according their goodness and their fidelity on earth. In the Book of the Secrets of Enoch it is

said, “In the world to come there are many mansions prepared for men; good for good, evil for evil”. That picture likens heaven to a vast palace in which there are many rooms with each assigned a room such as his life has merited.

(ii). In the Greek writer, Pausanias the word *monai* means ‘stages upon the way’. If that is how to take it here, it means that there are many stages on the way to heaven and even in heaven there is progress and development and advance. At least some of the great early Christian thinkers had that belief. Origen was one. He said that when a man died, his soul went to some place called Paradise, which is still upon earth. There he received teaching and training and when he was worthy and fit, his soul ascended into the air. It then passed through various *monai*, stages, which the Greeks called ‘spheres’ and which the Christians called heavens, until finally it reached the heavenly kingdom. In so doing the soul followed Jesus who as the writer of Hebrews said, ‘gone through heavens’ (Heb. 4:14). Irenaeus speak of a certain interpretation of the sentence which tells how the seed that is sown produces sometimes a hundred fold, sometimes sixtyfold and sometimes thirtyfold (Mtt.13:8). There was a different yield and therefore a different reward. Some men will be counted worthy to pass all their eternity in the presence of God, others will rise to Paradise, and others will become citizens of ‘the city’. Clement of Alexandria believed that there were degrees of glory, rewards and stages in proportion to a man’s achievement in holiness in this life.

There is something attractive here. There is a sense in which the soul shrinks from what we might call a static heaven. There is something attractive in the idea of a development which goes on even in the heavenly places. Speaking in purely human and inadequate terms, we sometimes feel that we would be dazzled with too much splendor, if we were immediately ushered into the very presence of God. We feel that even in heaven we would need to be purified and helped until we could face the greater glory.

(iii). But it may well be that the meaning is very simple and very lovely. There are many rooms in my Father’s house may simply mean that in heaven there is room for all. An earthly house becomes over crowded, and earthly inn must sometimes turn away the weary traveler because its accommodation is exhausted. It is not so with our Father’s house, for heaven is as wide as the heart of God and there is

room for all. Jesus is saying to his friends “Do not be afraid, men may shut their doors upon you, but in heaven you will never be shut out.

There are certain other great truths within this passage.

(a) It tells us of the honesty of Jesus, “If it were not so” said Jesus, “I would not have told you, I am going there to prepare a place for you”. No one could ever claim that he had been inveigled into Christianity by specious promises or under false pretences. Jesus told men bluntly that the Christian must bid farewell to comfort (Lk. 9:57-58). He told them of the persecution, the hatred, the penalties they would have to bear (Mtt. 10:15-22). He told them of the Cross which they must carry (Mtt. 16:24), even although he told them also of the glory of the ending of the Christian way. He frankly and honestly told men what they might expect both of glory and of pain if they followed him. He was not a leader who tried to bribe men with promises of an easy way; he tried to challenge them into greatness.

(b). It tells us of the function of Jesus. He said “I am going there to prepare a place for you”. One of the great thoughts of the New Testament is that Jesus goes on in front for us to follow. He opens up a way so that we may follow in his steps. One of the great words which is used to describe Jesus is the word “prodromos” (Heb. 6:20). The Authorized Version and the Revised Standard Version translate it “forerunner”. There are two uses of this word which light up the picture within it. In the Roman Army the prodromoi were the reconnaissance troops. They went ahead of the main body of the army to blaze the trail and to ensure that it was safe for the rest of the troops to follow. The harbor of Alexandria was very difficult to approach. When the great corn ships came into it a little pilot boat was sent out to guide them along the channel into safe waters. That pilot boat was called prodromos. It went first to make it safe for others to follow. That was what Jesus did. He blazed the way to heaven and to God that we might follow in his steps.

(c). It tells us of the ultimate triumph of Jesus. He said, “I will come back”. The second coming of Jesus is a doctrine which has to a large extent dropped out of Christian thinking and preaching. The curious thing about it is that Christians seem either entirely to disregard it or to think of nothing else. It is true that we cannot tell when it will happen or what will happen, but one thing is certain – history is going somewhere. Without a climax it would be necessarily

incomplete. History must have a consummation; and the consummation will be the triumph of Jesus Christ; and he promises that in the day of his triumph he will welcome his friends.

(d). Jesus said, “That you also may be where I am”. Here is a great truth put in the simplest way; for the Christian heaven is where Jesus is. We do not need to speculate on what heaven will be like. It is enough to know that we will be forever with him. When we love someone with our whole heart, we are really alive only when we are with that person. It is so with Christ In this world our contact with him is shadowy, and spasmodic, for we are poor creatures and cannot live always on the heights. But the best definition is to say that heaven is that state where we will always be with Jesus.

As I said before there are many more passages in the New Testament dealing with God’s promises, and showing that obedience to some conditions are actually is necessary for the fulfillment of those promises, I have just taking these few because of space and time. God’s promises assuring final redemption ultimately contingent upon human obedience to the conditions necessary for the fulfillment of the promises.

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