

God's Promises

I think, if this should be the end of all, and if all I have been born for is to work my heart and life away, and to sicken in this dreary place, with those mill-stones in my ears forever, until I could scream out for them to stop and let me have a little piece of quiet, and with the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath of the clear air, and my mother gone, and I never able to tell her again how I loved her, and of all my troubles,—I think, if this life is the end, and that there is no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes, I could go mad!

A dying factory girl in Mary Gaskell's 1855 novel *North and South*

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had vanished, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready like a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice proclaiming from the throne: 'Now God has his dwelling with mankind! He will dwell among them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There shall be an end to death, and to mourning and crying and pain, for the old order has passed away!'

Revelation 21: 1-4

The Spirit of God affirms to our spirit that we are God's children; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ; but we must share his sufferings if we are also to share his glory. For I reckon that the

sufferings we now endure bear no comparison with the glory, as yet unrevealed, which is in store for us.

Romans 8: 16-18

What is more, we also, to whom the Spirit is given as the firstfruits of the harvest to come, are groaning inwardly while we look forward eagerly to our adoption, our liberation from mortality. It was with this hope that we were saved. Now to see something is no longer to hope: why hope for what is already seen? But if we hope for something we do not yet see, then we look forward to it eagerly and with patience.

In the same way the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness. We do not even know how we ought to pray, but through our inarticulate groans the Spirit himself is pleading for us, and God who searches our inmost being knows what the Spirit means, because he pleads for God's people as God himself wills; and in everything, as we know, he co-operates for good with those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

With all this in mind, what are we to say? If God is on our side, who is against us? He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all; how can he fail to lavish every other gift upon us? Who will bring a charge against those whom God has chosen? Not God, who acquits! Who will pronounce judgement? Not Christ, who died, or rather rose again; not Christ, who is at God's right hand and pleads our cause! Then what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger, or sword? 'We are being done to death for your sake all day long,' as scripture says; 'we have been treated like sheep for slaughter' – and yet, throughout it all, overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us. For I am convinced that there is nothing in

death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths—nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8: 23-39

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from heeding my groans?

My God, by day I cry to you, but there is no answer;
in the night I cry with no respite.

You, the praise of Israel,
are enthroned in the sanctuary.

In you our fathers put their trust;
they trusted, and you rescued them.

To you they cried and were delivered;
in you they trusted and were not discomfited.

But I am a worm, not a man,
abused by everyone, scorned by the people.

All who see me jeer at me,
grimace at me, and wag their heads:

‘He threw himself on the Lord for rescue;
let the Lord deliver him, for he holds him dear!’

But you are he who brought me from the womb,
who laid me at my mother’s breast.

To your care I was entrusted at birth;
from my mother’s womb you have been my God.

Do not remain far from me,
for trouble is near and I have no helper.
A herd of bulls surrounds me,
great bulls of Bashan beset me.
Lions ravening and roaring
open their mouths wide against me.
My strength drains away like water
and all my bones are racked.
My heart has turned to wax
and melts within me.
My mouth is dry as a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my gums;
I am laid low in the dust of death.
Hounds are all about me;
a band of ruffians rings me round,
and they have bound me hand and foot.
I tell my tale of misery,
while they look on gloating.
They share out my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garments.
But do not remain far away, Lord;
you are my help, come quickly to my aid.
Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the axe.
Save me from the lion's mouth,
this poor body from the horns of the wild ox.
I shall declare your fame to my associates,

praising you in the midst of the assembly.

You that fear the Lord, praise him;

hold him in honour, all you descendants of Jacob,

revere him, you descendants of Israel.

For he has not scorned him who is downtrodden,

nor shrunk in loathing from his plight,

nor hidden his face from him,

but he has listened to his cry for help.

You inspire my praise in the great assembly;

I shall fulfil my vows in the sight of those who fear you.

Let the humble eat and be satisfied.

Let those who seek the Lord praise him.

May you always be in good heart!

Let all the ends of the earth remember

and turn again to the Lord;

let all the families of the nations bow before him.

For kingly power belongs to the Lord;

dominion over the nations is his.

How can those who sleep in the earth do him homage,

how can those who go down to the grave do obeisance?

But I shall live for his sake;

my descendants will serve him.

The coming generation will be told of the Lord;

they will make known his righteous deeds,

declaring to a people yet unborn:

‘The Lord has acted.’

They asked, 'What sign can you give us, so that we may see it and believe you? What is the work you are doing? Our ancestors had manna to eat in the desert; as scripture says, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." ' Jesus answered, 'In very truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread that God gives comes down from heaven and brings life to the world.' 'Sir,' they said to him, 'give us this bread now and always.' Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. **Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But you, as I said, have seen and yet you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never turn away. I have come down from heaven, to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me. It is his will that I should not lose even one of those he has given me, but should raise them all up on the last day. For it is my Father's will that everyone who sees the Son and has faith in him should have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.'**

In very truth I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, yet they are dead. I am speaking of the bread that comes down from heaven; whoever eats it will never die. I am the living bread that has come down from heaven; if anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.

John 6: 30-40, 47-50

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

John 11: 25

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive

2 Corinthians 15: 22

Remember those early days when, newly enlightened, you met the test of great suffering and held firm. Some of you were publicly exposed to abuse and tormented, while others stood loyally by those who were so treated. For indeed you shared the sufferings of those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the seizure of your possessions, knowing that you had a better, more lasting possession. Do not, therefore, throw away your confidence, for it carries a great reward. You need endurance in order to do God's will and win what he has promised. For, in the words of scripture,

very soon he who is to come will come;

he will not delay;

and by faith my righteous servant shall find life;

but if anyone shrinks back,

I take no pleasure in him.

But we are not among those who shrink back and are lost; we have the faith to preserve our life.

Faith gives substance to our hopes and convinces us of realities we do not see.

It was for their faith that the people of old won God's approval.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed by God's command, so that the visible came forth from the invisible.

By faith Abel offered a greater sacrifice than Cain's; because of his faith God approved his offerings and attested his goodness; and through his faith, though he is dead, he continues to speak.

By faith Enoch was taken up to another life without passing through death; he was not to be found, because God had taken him, and it is the testimony of scripture that before he was taken he had pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever comes to God must believe that he exists and rewards those who seek him.

By faith Noah took good heed of the divine warning about the unseen future, and built an ark to save his household. Through his faith he put the whole world in the wrong, and made good his own claim to the righteousness which comes of faith.

By faith Abraham obeyed the call to leave his home for a land which he was to receive as a possession; he went away without knowing where he was to go. By faith he settled as an alien in the land which had been promised him, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him to the same promise. For he was looking forward to a city with firm foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith even Sarah herself was enabled to conceive, though she was past the age, because she judged that God who had promised would keep faith. Therefore from one man, a man as good as dead, there sprang descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens or the countless grains of sand on the seashore.

All these died in faith. Although they had not received the things promised, yet they had seen them far ahead and welcomed them, and acknowledged themselves to be strangers and aliens without fixed abode on earth. Those who speak in that way show plainly that they are looking for a country of their own. If their thoughts had been with the country they had left, they could have found opportunity to return. Instead, we find them

longing for a better country, a heavenly one. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he has a city ready for them.

Hebrews 10: 32—11: 16

Now I am going away to him who sent me. None of you asks me, “Where are you going?” Yet you are plunged into grief at what I have told you. Nevertheless I assure you that it is in your interest that I am leaving you. If I do not go, the advocate will not come, whereas if I go, I will send him to you.

John 16: 5-7

‘You must wait’, [Jesus] said, ‘for the gift promised by the Father, of which I told you; John, as you know, baptized with water, but within the next few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

When they were all together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time at which you are to restore sovereignty to Israel?’ He answered, ‘It is not for you to know about dates or times which the Father has set within his own control. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will bear witness for me in Jerusalem, and throughout all Judaea and Samaria, and even in the farthest corners of the earth.’

Acts 1: 4-8

In very truth I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will be glad. But though you will be plunged in grief, your grief will be turned to joy. A woman in labour is in pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish in her joy that a child has been born into the world. So it is with you: for the moment you are sad; but I shall see you

again, and then you will be joyful, and no one shall rob you of your joy.
When that day comes you will ask me nothing more.

John 16: 20-23

[Jesus sitting with his apostles, praying to his Father in heaven:] 'It is not for these alone that I pray, but for those also who through their words put their faith in me. May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. The glory which you gave me I have given to them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and you in me, may they be perfectly one. Then the world will know that you sent me, and that you loved them as you loved me.

'Father, they are your gift to me; and my desire is that they may be with me where I am, so that they may look upon my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the world began. Righteous Father, although the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love you had for me may be in them, and I in them.'

John 17: 20-26

'Blessed are the poor in spirit;
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Blessed are the sorrowful;
they shall find consolation.

Blessed are the gentle;
they shall have the earth for their possession.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail;
they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who show mercy;
mercy shall be shown to them.

Blessed are those whose hearts are pure;
they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers;
they shall be called God's children.

Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right;
the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

'Blessed are you, when you suffer insults and persecution and calumnies of every kind for my sake. Exult and be glad, for you have a rich reward in heaven; in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.'

Matthew 5: 3-12

Do not ask anxiously, "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What shall we wear?" These are the things that occupy the minds of the heathen, but your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well. So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has troubles enough of its own.

Matthew 6: 31-34

Meanwhile near the cross on which Jesus hung, his mother was standing with her sister, Mary wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother, with the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, Jesus said to her, 'Mother, there is your son'; and to the disciple, 'There is your mother'; and from that moment the disciple took her into his home.

John 19: 25-27

So they brought the boy to him; and as soon as the spirit saw him it threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell on the ground and rolled about foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked his father, 'How long has he been like this?' 'From childhood,' he replied; 'it has often tried to destroy him by throwing him into the fire or into water. But if it is at all possible for you, take pity on us and help us.' 'If it is possible!' said Jesus. 'Everything is possible to one who believes.' At once the boy's father cried: 'I believe; help my unbelief.'

Mark 9: 20-24

And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Eli'jah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Eli'jah?"

1 Kings 19: 11-13

Compiled by Charles Foster

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