

THE PRICE OF GOD'S PROMISES Luke 2:25-35

(CSB) "There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple complex. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for Him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took Him up in his arms, praised God, and said, ²⁹ 'Now, Master, You can dismiss Your servant in peace, as You promised. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation. ³¹ You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples—³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to Your people Israel.' ³³ His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about Him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and told His mother Mary: 'Indeed, this Child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed—³⁵ and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'"

INTRODUCTION

A boy of 10 attended a Christian camp with his father. One night, a retired missionary stirred the hearts of the camp crowd with stories of miracles he'd seen and startling conversions among the people where he faithfully labored for over 30 years. That night, the boy told his father he'd like to be a "retired missionary" when he grew up. What was this boy overlooking? It cost this missionary untold sacrifices, hardships, and years of endurance to experience the marvelous ways God had delivered upon His promises to him. Today, we look at two people, Simeon and Mary, who were promised by God to play special, even stunning, roles in the earthly life of our Savior, **Jesus**! But the fulfillment of God's promises to them cost them dearly.

The Bible is the revelation of God's divinely inspired words of love and guidance to us who are "created" in His "image" and "likeness" (**Genesis 1:26-27**). The Bible is a Book of history, poetry, proverbs, parables, biographies—and, of profound importance, it is a book of promises—God's promises. God's promises span from the 2nd chapter of **Genesis** to the final chapter of **Revelation**. **Joshua 21:45** (NASB) summarizes God's faithfulness toward the people of Israel at the close of the extreme dangers and challenges they faced in being delivered from slavery in Egypt and gaining victory over the hostile armies of the new land God had promised since the days of Abraham (**Genesis 15**) would one day become their home: "Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass."

R. Kelso Carter, born in 1849, became a star athlete at the Pennsylvania Military Academy, where he achieved the highest academic honors, as well. His résumé flourished as an ordained Methodist minister, a novelist, a professor in chemistry, natural science, civil engineering, and mathematics (for which he also wrote the textbooks) at the Pennsylvania Military Academy, a musician and songwriter, and he even earned a medical degree. He spent the last years of his professional life as a practicing physician! But at age 30, Kelso Carter became critically ill with a heart problem. Doctors told him there was nothing they could do. All of his vast potential for earthly achievement and good seemed to be on the verge of being extinguished.

Carter committed his soul to **Jesus** as a youth. But during his health crisis, the Bible became more alive and personally relevant to him than ever. Instead of turning from God in despair, he cooperated as the Holy Spirit performed surgery upon his heart to free him from crippling self-centeredness. He began to study with new zeal and intensity the great promises of God set forth throughout the Scriptures to envision the future God might yet want for him. Finally, he came to the point that he prayed, "Lord, whether You see fit to heal me or not, from now on my life is fully Yours, and I'm going to stand on Your promises." As a testimony to his fresh commitments fully to trust in and live for Christ, he composed the lyrics and music to his great hymn, *Standing on the Promises*. The second verse declares, "Standing on the promises that cannot fail, When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, By the living Word of God I shall prevail,

Standing on the Promises of God." Not immediately, but several years later, his health began to improve. Kelso Carter then achieved all the honors and acts of service for which he is most remembered, before he passed into Heaven at age 79. God doesn't always see fit to heal our illnesses in this life or deliver us from earthly woes. This depends upon His plans for us, which should always have priority over our plans. But one thing is certain: If we will commit ourselves to paying the Price the fulfillment of God's promises to us may require, this will enhance the likelihood we will experience God's wondrous Payoff on His promises!

I. THE PRICE OF GOD'S PROMISES

"There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him.²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah." Nothing else is known specifically about Simeon than what Luke tells us. "Righteous," in this case, means he conducted himself honestly and fairly in his dealings with others. "Devout" translates a Greek verb that Luke alone uses in the New Testament. It literally means, "to take hold of carefully and well." When used to describe Simeon's character, it means, he "carefully lived as one fully aware of God's presence and honored God's claims upon his life."

Jews of his day could be roughly divided into three groups. Some grew embittered against God for the continued oppression He allowed them to suffer under various rulers and empires after they began returning to the land of Israel some 500 years earlier. Witnessing the death of their loved ones, or their lives or lands being ravaged by their conquerors, made some lose faith the good God of Israel even existed. A second and by far the largest group of Jews believed God had promised them as His chosen people they would one day become masters of the world and rulers over all other peoples. God would send them a Celestial Champion, the Messiah ("Anointed One") to deliver them supernaturally from the Romans, revenge them upon their enemies, and rule over them with a greater glory than that of David or Solomon's Kingdoms.

A third group had no dreams of a violent overthrow of the Roman Empire, or of the power to rule the world, or of a Divine King at the head of Israel's armies. They kept their eyes upon the LORD and off their often gloomy circumstances, and they resisted temptations to be filled with bitterness toward God or hatred toward their Roman rulers. They waited faithfully and patiently for the LORD to fulfill His promises to them of **Isaiah 40-66**, when the Messiah would inaugurate Israel's *spiritual restoration* built upon righteousness, holiness, and peace. **Isaiah 40:1-5** promises, "'Comfort, comfort My people,' says your God. ²'Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and announce to her that her time of forced labor is over, her iniquity has been pardoned, and she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.' ³A voice of one crying out: 'Prepare the way of the LORD in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert. ⁴Every valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill will be leveled; the uneven ground will become smooth and the rough places, a plain. ⁵And the glory of the LORD will appear, and all humanity together will see it, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'" People of this group believed God's Messiah might come any day, so they lived in the personal purity and spiritual readiness worthy of His appearing, as Christians are instructed to do in **Titus 2:11-13** (NCV) as we await the Messiah's (Christ's) Second Coming: "God's grace that can save everyone has come. ¹²It teaches us not to live against God nor to do the evil things the world wants to do. Instead, that grace teaches us to live in the present age in a wise and right way and in a way that shows we serve God. ¹³We should live like that while we wait for our great hope and the coming of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."

Simeon demonstrated such remarkably God-honoring, confident patience in "looking forward to Israel's consolation," that, "the Holy Spirit was on him." This unusual language suggests God's Spirit rested upon Simeon in a rare manner, such as few prophets ever experienced. God further rewarded Simeon by taking him into His special confidence. "It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah." **Psalms 25:14** promises: "The secret counsel of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He reveals His covenant to them."

²⁷ "Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple complex. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for Him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon took Him up in his arms, praised God, and said, ²⁹ 'Now, Master, You can dismiss Your servant in peace, as You promised. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation. ³¹ You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples—³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to Your people Israel.'" Simeon enjoyed such priceless intimacy with the LORD that God gave him two extraordinary promises: The Messiah would certainly come within his lifetime and Simeon would behold Him personally! Many in his day would have given a lot for the privilege of being "guided by the Spirit" to encounter and hold the infant Christ Child "in" their "arms." Simeon alone paid the price of devotion to pleasing the LORD and selfless trust in his "Master" necessary to qualify for these privileges. "Master" translates the Greek word *despotēs*, from which our English word "despot" (a ruler with absolute authority) derives. Simeon accepted the LORD's absolute authority to run the details of his life as God thought best for His divine purposes, without demanding of the LORD what God should do or must do.

Mary paid a dear price for being the Messiah's earthly mother, after God promised her through the angel Gabriel she had been chosen for this privilege (**Luke 1:26-37**): the shame of being an apparently promiscuous, unwed mother in a small town, Joseph nearly divorcing her, the difficult journey to Bethlehem late in her pregnancy, and accepting responsibility to care for "the Son of the Most High" God of Israel! But Simeon warned Mary of a future, more heart-wrenching price she would be called upon one day to pay: ³³ "His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about Him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and told His mother Mary: 'Indeed, this Child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed—³⁵ and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'" The Greek word here for "sword" does not describe the short sword or dagger worn by the soldiers who arrested **Jesus** (**Luke 22:52**), but the large, broad, two-edged sword that could hack an opponent in two. "Soul" is from the Greek word for the "seat of one's emotions." Simeon vividly describes the anguish Mary would experience throughout **Jesus'** arrest, trial, condemnation, and, especially, when her heart was torn in two while she stood by helplessly at the foot of His Cross (**John 19:25-26**).

II. THE PAYOFF OF GOD'S PROMISES

We all thrill over dramatic answers to prayer, or when God decisively delivers upon His promises to us. But we should be realistic about the price tag that may be required of us if we are to be privileged to enjoy some of God's choicest promises. We don't want to be like the boy wanting to be a "retired missionary" with a lifetime of memories of great demonstrations of God's presence and power, without demonstrating the faithfulness of a lifetime of devotion to the Lord. In America, it seems easier to have unrealistic expectations of the Lord than in some countries. We don't want to be like the fellow in this story. Two friends met each other on an American street one day. One looked downcast; almost in tears. The other man asked, "What has the world done to you, my old friend?" The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, my uncle died and left me forty thousand dollars." "That's a lot of money." The gloomy man added, "But you see, two weeks ago, a cousin died I never even knew, and he left me eighty-five thousand dollars, free and clear." "My; how God has blessed you!" exclaimed his friend. "You don't understand!" the sad man interrupted. "Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million from her." Now his friend became really confused. "Then, why do you look so glum?" he asked. The downcast man moaned, "Because after waiting expectantly all this week, there's been nothing!"

³⁴ "Then Simeon blessed them and told His mother Mary: 'Indeed, this Child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed—³⁵ and a sword will pierce your own soul—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'" By these words, Simeon foretold of the conflict Christ would encounter in seeking to deliver upon God's promises of the "salvation" God "prepared . . . in the presence of all peoples—³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to Your people Israel.'" **Jesus** had to pay the dearest price of all, by His sacrificial death in our behalf, before He could experience "the joy that God put before Him" of gaining everlasting salvation and bliss for millions (**Hebrews 12:2**, NCV).

But those unwilling to meet God's price of repentance from their rebellion against Him, and admitting they are so helpless to do anything to gain forgiveness from a holy God that they must put their full faith in what **Jesus** did for them on the Cross, will fail to receive the forgiveness God promises them totally as a gift of His love, by grace. To them, Christ is "a sign that will be opposed," "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." In other words, we reveal our true colors by our reception or rejection of God's terms of peace to us offered through **Jesus**, and we make the choice to "fall" away from the LORD into everlasting darkness or to "rise" with **Jesus** into God's never-ending "light."

CONCLUSION

People are often flighty or false about their promises, no matter how much they swear their loyalty. A young man walked into a photography studio with a picture of his girlfriend. He wanted the picture duplicated. The storeowner noticed this inscription on the back of the picture: "My Dearest Tom, I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity." It was signed "Diane." It contained a P.S.: "If we ever break up, I want this picture back."

There's a remarkable story of genuine loyalty that survived the crucible of one of the worst battles of World War II. It's also a story of a promise made early in 1944 that was finally kept in August of 2001.

Harold Huggins, from Albany, IL, and Mack McClain from Marysville, CA, were best friends in the army. They were together at Anzio Beach, on the western shore of central Italy; one of the bloodiest battles of WW II that began January 22, 1944. Mack had a premonition he wouldn't make it out of there alive, so he gave Harold some mementos, a belt, some photos, and said: "'Give this to my sister; tell her that I love her,' Huggins recalls. "'You can even give her a kiss.'" Harold promised if anything happened to Mack he would do what was asked. One day later, Mack was killed in an artillery barrage. After the war, Harold looked for Mack's sister but he never found her until Harold's daughter sent out E-mails to various veterans groups. Some California vets found Mack's sister, Grace, whose last name changed when she married. "We have always hoped and prayed we would meet somebody that would tell us about Mack," says Grace.

Thursday, August 2, 2001, at the place where his buddy's name is engraved in marble at the Veterans Memorial in Marysville, CA, Harold kept the promise he made 57 years earlier, meeting Mack's sister for the very first time, turning over the mementos from his fallen friend, and giving her the kiss that Mack asked Harold to deliver. God's Spirit clearly orchestrated this tearfully received and yet joyously delivered promise that Harold Huggins made to his wartime best pal, Mack McClain. Huggins, a veteran of 10 major campaigns in WW II and the last survivor of his battalion, traveled halfway across the country by train on one last mission in memory of his best buddy. "I had this on my mind for 57 years, trying to locate his sister and loved ones out there in California," says Huggins. "Part of him lives in me." Huggins never forgot his best friend and never gave up on his promise to him, despite the difficulties and delays involved.

If people on occasion can rise to such glowing displays of faithfully delivering on their promises, what should this suggest to us about our best "Friend," **Jesus Christ (John 15:14-15)**? Is He not able to overcome whatever difficulties or delays He encounters in delivering upon His promises to us, especially when we wait with the patient hope of Mack McClain's sister, Grace? **Psalms 34:15** reminds us. "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry for help." If we are ever tempted to despair of our prayers being answered when we have based our hopes upon the promises of God in the Bible, we should heed God's encouragement to us found in **Hebrews 10:36 & 13:5** (NLT): "Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that He has promised." "For God has said, 'I will never fail you. I will never abandon you'" (quoting **Deuteronomy 31:6**).