

## A GREAT PROMISE

"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." Joshua 1:5.

Moses, the great lawgiver, had found the task of leading the Israelites from Egypt to the borders of the promised land too much for his strength. Constant rebellions and murmurings had weakened his hands. "They provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips," and in consequence he was not permitted to lead them into Canaan.

When Moses died the children of Israel were without a leader. Among them was a young man of great promise. His ability and faithfulness had already distinguished him. Greatly impressed by him, Moses had selected him as his successor. While Moses, the incomparable man of his day, had died, God's work had to go on. Regardless of how many depart this life, God does not die, and His work must go on. That great inscription in Westminster Abbey in London is very arresting and impressive: "God buries the workman, but the work goes on." Even though Moses was the outstanding man of the Old Testament, and one of the outstanding characters in all history, he was not indispensable to God's work.

Moses had gone and God summoned Joshua. Less gifted than Moses in some respects, yet he possessed many sterling qualities necessary in a leader. He was now the head and director of a great people. Joshua had been in the habit of depending on Moses and his leadership, so his heart might well have failed him that Moses was no longer with him. God did not fail Joshua, but graciously advised him as to the way in which he should go and what he should do.

God called to Joshua and said, "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." Joshua 1:2-5. Because Moses was dead God sought to stir Joshua out of his inactivity, his slothfulness, and his ordinary, small, unworthy and insufficient plans. God challenged him to measure up to the great days and demands which were upon him because of the passing of the great leader, Moses.

It was a difficult task to which Joshua was assigned. He was not only to lead the Israelites, but to lead them in battle, and against foes more numerous and better prepared for war than themselves. Yet the consciousness that he had been marked out for the task, as well as his determination to obey the orders he had received, sustained Joshua. It is to his credit that Joshua was no youthful dreamer, but one long past middle life, who had no exaggerated estimate of Israel's faithfulness, and no illusions about his task. Joshua knew that in the passing of Moses the work had suffered an irreparable loss, but he also knew full well that when heroes pass away the power that made them still remains.

One never knows for what God is preparing him. Joshua did not know, when he walked along as the humble servant of Moses through some forty years, that God was getting him ready to take up Moses' work when the great law-giver should pass away. Elisha did not know, when he drove the oxen, plowing in the field, that a little later he was to take the mantle of the intrepid and powerful Elijah and carry on God's work when the great prophet should leave this earth. Paul did not know, when he was three years in Arabia, that God was getting him ready to be an apostle in his witness to the whole world. We never know what God is getting us ready for, but we do know that the way of promotion is through faithfulness. In the sight of God fidelity is the highest criterion of character. Christ taught that if we are faithful in the least, we shall be faithful in much, but if we are unfaithful in the little things, we shall not measure up when the mighty demands are upon us. The way of promotion is that of faithfulness. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," Revelation 2:10. Faithful unto death means to be faithful to the dying point, that is, die before you will be deflected from the right.

God takes a special interest in human lives. He is not an uninterested, unfeeling spectator of human affairs. Every event is closely observed by Him. Joshua had reached an important epoch in his experience. It was a time when he needed special help and guidance, and, as is always the case, God came to his rescue and supplied his needs. God's appearance to and blessing upon Joshua is not an isolated case. He comes to men now. All men have important epochs in their lives, such as, when they are young and just starting out in life; when the toil of the years is swept away by some disaster; when loved ones are taken, and the hours of loneliness follow; when there are intense yearnings after a higher and better life. God often comes to people without their solicitation of His assistance. Like the mother who, while attending to the duties of her household, still keeps her eye on the little one at play that she may interpose in time of danger, so God, while controlling the affairs of the universe watches with concern every individual, in order that He may succour in times of need.

God appealed to His own past conduct to encourage His servant, Joshua, to trust Him. He said, "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." Here was a solid foundation upon which Joshua could rest. We are influenced more by the past conduct of a friend than by his promises. When a promise is made, the mind at once reverts to the past. If the one making the promise has been true, we trust; if he has been insincere and undependable, we distrust. Joshua had numerous opportunities for judging God's faithfulness to others, and especially to Moses. Now, here was the definite promise that God would be with him just as surely as He had been with Moses.

As special stress is laid upon the way in which God was with Moses, let us notice some of the leading features in His conduct. God was with Moses continuously from the beginning of his journey to his burial. God was with him, notwithstanding a variation of conduct on the part of His servant. Moses was a most exemplary man, and yet on two occasions he gave way to anger. God was with him under circumstances of great provocation, for the children of Israel frequently rebelled against him and his orders. As a Friend of infinite resource God proved Himself adequate for all their needs. God was with Moses as an unerring guide. Circumstances arose which called for the exercise of great wisdom, but Moses never failed a single time when He followed God's directions. It is good to have a friend who can deliver one out of trouble, but it is far better to have one whose wise counsels prevent our getting into difficulties. God remained with Moses to uphold his position against usurpation on the part of others. Well might Joshua be courageous and confident when God said to him, "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee."

This promise to Joshua had in it just the inspiration that he needed. When compared to Moses, Joshua sinks far below the mighty standards and ability represented in the life and service of the great law-giver. For forty years he had followed in the steps of Moses as his servant, obeying his commands and following his leadership. Now he must take Moses' place, which is an entirely different proposition. One can well believe that Joshua cried out as did Paul when great duties were thrust upon him, "Who is sufficient for these things?" A man who can face the heavy duties and tremendous responsibilities that are laid upon him without being made tremulous in spirit is unfit for that opportunity of service.

Moses had gone, and Joshua must take his place. No wonder Joshua cried unto God for guidance, mercy and help. Of course, we are not surprised that God answered him by saying, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." This was God's promise to him in the trials, disappointments and experiences through which he would pass. Many of his men would fail him. They failed Moses after crossing the Red Sea. Only Caleb and Joshua were on Moses' side and stood true to him. The other ten spies failed him. They wailed out their discouragements, unbelief and cowardice. They failed him. Oh pitifully wretched thing when men entrusted with responsibility fail!

That was a pitiful word spoken by Paul when he said, "At my first appearing no man stood with me, nevertheless, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me." That plain preacher stood unabashed before the purple-robed Nero, while the other Christians, frightened lest they should be killed were hiding back in the darkness. Paul said, "Nevertheless, the Lord

stood with me and strengthened me." That is what the Lord always does for His faithful ones. That, in effect, is what He said to Joshua, "No matter who fails, no matter who flees, no matter who forsakes, I will stand with you and you must carry on bravely."

That was the word for Joshua and now it is the word for us. Just as certainly as this word was for Joshua, it is for us, and we must not forget it. This is the word for us now. "As I was with your father and mother; as I was with the other great leaders yesterday who witnessed and wrought so valiantly and triumphantly, so will I be with you, provided you go with Me; provided you do as I command you; provided you are faithful to the appointments that I have set for you. I will be with you." That is His word for us.

When will He be with us to guide us and strengthen us and empower us? He will be with us when we obey Him and give Him and His cause the first, the primary, the central and the uppermost place in our lives. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33. What things? The temporalities of life, such as food, raiment and a home, "shall be added unto you." Give God and His work first place in your life and He will add to you that which is best for you. It may not be all you want. It may not be exactly what you would choose at any time, but it will be the right thing. It will be the best thing. Give the Lord's cause first place in your life. As Paul said, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." I Corinthians 10:31.

Frequently we make the mistake of talking about the sacred and the secular in our Lord's work. There is no such thing. You are to be a Christian not only at church on Sunday, but all of the other days of the week and wherever you may be. If we give Christ's cause the first place in our lives, He is certain to be with us. If we obey Him, He has promised to be with us in our personal lives. The governing principle in the kingdom of God is stated in three simple words: "Obedience to Christ." "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." John 15:14. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." John 14:15. His commandments are to be kept without evasion or reservation. We come sadly short in spiritual blessings because we fail to recognize Him and give Him His rightful place as our Lord and Master. He goes before us, and we are responsible to follow Him and to do what He bids us.

To take to heart God's commands and promises, and to obey Him, does not mean that work is to be excluded from our lives. Prayer and work go together. Spurgeon wisely said, "Work without prayer is presumption, and prayer without work is hypocrisy." Before going into one of the most important of all his battles, Cromwell said to his soldiers: "Soldiers, put your trust in God, without reserve, but be sure to keep your powder dry." They would not get very far in a great battle with wet powder.

That was a great story about the little girl whose heart ached so terribly when a little bird was caught in a trap and her brothers refused to let the little thing out. It beat its little wings against the sides of the trap, longing to get out to the trees and the hills and the mountains. The little girl grieved over the imprisoned bird. She begged her brothers to let it out, but they would not, and she said to her mother, "I am going to pray to God to let it out." Her mother said, "All right." She went away somewhere and prayed, and came back in a little while and said to her mother, "It is all right." The mother asked, "Did you pray that the little bird might be let out of the trap?" She said, "Yes." Then the mother said, "Then do not worry about it any more." The little girl said, "I did more than that. I went out and kicked the trap to pieces and let it out myself." A good many traps need kicking to pieces.

We should pray, but we must do more than that. We must work. Having prayed, let us lift, serve, teach, preach and witness for Christ. God's promise, "I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee," does not exclude work. Put heroic work into your service for Christ. There is no substitute for work. Work is of divine appointment and was instituted

in Eden before sin came to defile the world and before God had to say, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Work is the basis of happiness, to a remarkable degree, individual happiness and collective happiness. Work is the safeguard of society, but idleness is perilous anywhere and everywhere.

Christian, God's great promise, "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee," is for you, as you walk in the pathway of obedience to Him. Let this promise mean, "As I was with thy parents, who did their work bravely, patiently and well to the end of the day, in like manner I will be with thee, if thou wilt walk in their steps with the right kind of devotion and behavior in the sight of God and of men." Whether in the home, the church, the school or the community, do your work with all diligence. In all the relationships of life live at your bravest and best for Christ and for humanity, for whom He died, and thus crown all your days and ways with ever-increasing spiritual triumph. Whatever your condition or circumstances as a child of God, take this promise, "I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee," and make it your very own. This great and glorious promise includes His presence, His protection, His provision and His power. With the duty there will be the power to do it, for God will not fail us.