

CHALLENGING PROMISES OF THE BIBLE

Sample lesson by Ferdie J. Deering delivered
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About 18 months ago the materially rich but spiritually poor Howard Hughes died. He had a huge financial empire that he left behind, and potential heirs are scrambling to get a part of it. A lot of documents have turned up, claiming to be Hughes' last will and testament, or substitutes for same. They couldn't all be valid. One store even stocked specially printed "Howard Hughes Will Forms."

A couple of weeks ago, John D. MacArthur died. He was one of the two known billionaires in the United States. He left a will giving most of his possessions to charity and to civic benefit foundations. That is, what would be left of his estate after tax collectors got through with it.

It is a well established fact that when you go, you can't take it with you. And with taxes what they are, you can't leave it here, either. Nevertheless, it is a good idea for everybody to have and a will.

When Jesus died he had few worldly possessions. Those were claimed by rough Roman soldiers who had stripped him and hung him on the cross. Jesus left no houses, no wheat farms, no bank accounts, no stock portfolios. He had accumulated no expensive jewelry or trinkets for kinfolks to quarrel over. Jesus didn't even have a collection of religious literature to leave to rabbinic schools of Nazareth or Jerusalem. He was buried in a borrowed tomb.

Yet, Jesus left a will, bequeathing immeasurable riches to countless heirs who believe in him and who follow him. This will is inscribed in the New Testament. If this had been worded in modern legalistic language, it might have read something like this:

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

I, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God the Father, being in the complete mind, spirit, and will of the Father, do freely and joyfully bequest to each of you these benefits and blessings:

Eternal life, limitless love, forgiveness for sin, the power of prayer, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, directions for fruitful living, the fellowship of other Christians, the Holy Scriptures, resources for facing opposition, courage to overcome problems of life, a place in heaven in the presence of God, and many other good things which I described to you during the years of my ministry on earth, and all of the promises I made to you, my disciples.

All of these things are yours forever, if you are my disciples.---Jesus.

And oh yes, there's one other thing---Jesus also has given each of his followers a spiritual checkbook. We can use this means of obtaining things we need, in any amount, without fear of overdraft or exorbitant interest. This is great for me, because the spiritual bank account in Jesus' name is many, many times greater than the spiritual account based upon my own character and reputation.

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When Jesus faced the time of his death with his disciples, there was very little that he could leave them in the realm of material wealth. His legacy was one of abundant spiritual resources.

As Jesus spent his last hours with his disciples he spoke plainly about their needs and expectations. He tried to turn their minds away from preoccupation with what would be taken from them in his death. He focused attention on the spiritual resources they would have available to sustain them in the dreadful experience of separation from him. He reassured and challenged his disciples: **READ JOHN 13: 31-35.**

Jesus sought to comfort his disciples by interpreting his death as a victory rather than a defeat. His hour had come. It was a time of victory, revealing the love of God through the Son of God.

The Glory of God in the Scriptures involves the revelation of God's basic nature through visible signs of power. Evidence of God's Glory is shown through various means. The Cross was the greatest possible demonstration. It led to the Resurrection and visible evidence of the power of God over man's ultimate enemy---DEATH!

There was unique loneliness in Jesus' death, as there may be in all deaths. No one could share this experience with Jesus, as it was unique. Because of these events, Jesus' disciples, the apostles, you and I, enjoy eternal life. But Jesus told the apostles they could not go with him right then. There was other work for the apostles to do before they could join him in heaven. He probably has work for us to do, also, before we enter into the life that follows our life on earth.

Disciples are commanded not only to love God, but also their neighbors and their enemies. We are to reveal the strength of love through close personal relationships with fellow believers. The standard of love is stated as Jesus' own quality of love for his disciples. He said: "As I have loved you." Jesus' love was unconditional. There were no escape clauses in his pledge to love them.

Jesus' love was limitless. He didn't say: "Look, I really like you guys but I've got to have some time to myself. How about a five-days-a-week association. I need Saturdays and Sundays off." Jesus' love is limitless and timeless. **READ JOHN 14: 1-4.**

What Jesus was saying to the apostles he was saying to all of his followers. Take your eyes off your troubles. Place your confidence in God and in me. I have revealed the truth of God to you. Now believe in me and go forward. Jesus assured his disciples that his death, his going away, did not change his plans for them to have eternal life and eternal fellowship in heaven.

When Jesus said: **"I will come again."** (1) Did he mean that he would come for the believer at the time of the believer's death? (2) Did he refer to the final coming of Christ for his followers at the end of the age? (3) Did he refer to his return in the Spirit to his disciples following the Resurrection? All of these interpretations have been made but since Bible scholars have been debating them for centuries, we might not be able to settle all of these questions this morning. **READ JOHN 14: 5-6.**

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Thomas was like some of us. He was practical-minded and cautious. He wanted real tangible evidence in response to his questions. It was unclear to him where Jesus was going, and he argued that if a person didn't know his destination, he could not possibly choose the right way to get there. He wanted a road map.

One time, on a vacation, my family and I were lost in Des Moines. We knew where we wanted to go but we couldn't figure out from the map how to get there. At a traffic light I asked a man in the next car which way I should go. This was before air conditioning. He replied: "I'm going right by there. Follow me and I'll take you there." We did and he did.

Jesus said he is THE WAY. You want eternal life in heaven? Come with me, follow me, and I will take you there. He is the WAY for people to come to God the Father. Jesus said he is the LIFE. He is the source of eternal life. This life is much more than biological existence. It is spiritual perfection, purity, and perpetual happiness. **READ JOHN 14: 12-14.**

Reassuring the apostles wasn't easy. Even after Jesus had told them, they still were wringing their hands and saying: "But what will we do when you are gone?" This is a natural human reaction whenever we lose a loved one for any reason. But Jesus had tried to tell them beforehand.

In his reply, Jesus said, in effect, Truly, if you believe in me, you will do the kind of works, perform the kind of miracles, do good deeds as I have done. You may be able to do ever greater things because I am going to the Father, and I will still be helping you.

The next point is so important that John tells us Jesus said it twice. V.13= **"Whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do."** And again, V.14= **If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."** The reference to "asking in my name" means more than saying a prayer and adding the phrase: "In Jesus' name we pray," although that is a proper way to end a prayer. To pray in Jesus' name means to be praying in his character. Praying in Jesus' name implies one's willingness to identify totally with Jesus and his work.

To come to God in Jesus' name means to come consciously, calling upon the power of prayer delegated to us by Jesus. A Christian prays in Jesus' name when, accepting Christ's authority in all of life, he seeks God's power to carry out Christ's mission on earth.

It is not just praying for enough money to pay the bills, to buy a new car, or to satisfy another temporal need or personal whim. The praying Christian is seeking to identify his requests to God with those Jesus might make in such a setting and similar circumstances. This puts our prayers in a different light from just asking God to supply our personal needs and desires.

It is not that we aren't to pray for those things. We are to pray for our daily bread, and whatever else may be required and rightly desired. But whenever we truly pray in Jesus' name and expect to receive benefit of his power to the uttermost, we should try to identify our requests with the ultimate aims and purposes of Jesus Christ, our saviour.

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