

March 17

“UNKEPT PROMISES”

*When Everything Went ~~Wrong~~. Right!*



Viewing Holy Week Through the Eyes of Peter

## “Unkept Promises”

Matthew 26:30-35

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”  
But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”  
And all the other disciples said the same.

Special Music:

“Broken Promises”

Resurrection Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TenwKtkHhWI>

**Matthew 26:30-35**

**30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.**

**31 Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:**

**“ ‘I will strike the shepherd,**

**and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’**

**32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”**

**33 Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”**

**34 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”**

**35 But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”  
And all the other disciples said the same.**

## **HOLLOW PROMISES**

Promises aren't deals.  
They should never be half-baked,  
Impulsive words meant to emancipate  
Our temporary worries,  
Slurries of pernicious states.  
Never based on quid pro quo.  
Handshakes and tit-for-tat,  
Haggling over a cup-o-joe  
And bartering for consideration.  
Even more so  
Our promises to our Creator.  
Loan sharks with swinging bats  
Just ain't his style,  
Not by a mile.  
His is the only bloody signature  
On our contract, our covenant.  
We are bought and paid for  
Whether we think it's relevant  
Or not.  
God's not in the bargaining business,  
Even if we believe our souls  
Can be bought through mediation.  
Ignoring the thief on the cross  
There find no remuneration  
That we can provide.

Other than our belief,  
Which manifests itself as relief  
To our blackened souls.  
No, promises are a one-way street,  
Open-ended and pleading to be completed  
By the callouses on our minds  
And blood on our hands.  
He gives, and gives, and gives,  
And we take, and take, and take.  
It's the nature of our relationship  
That's at stake,  
As we stand in the wake  
Of his gracious and uncompromising love.  
But still, we make promises  
That we will never keep,  
Because for us the price is  
Just way too steep.  
Our souls are unaffordable.  
For all have sinned,  
All are sinning,  
All will sin.  
That's a fact.  
"No, we won't, Father,  
We won't give in  
To satan's grin."  
And God just shakes his head,  
Knowing the promise is vacant,

**Devoid any sentient truth.**

**“Even if all others fail**

**And drive the pounding nails**

**Into your feet and hands,**

**We will not be defeated!” we declare**

**Before the throne of the Holy Righteous.**

**We stand before God,**

**Hammer in one hand,**

**Apple core in the other,**

**Both hands hidden**

**Knowing they’re forbidden**

**Tucked in the shadows**

**Of the cloaks on our backs,**

**Waiting for the opportune moment**

**To break our vow**

**And claim our silver.**

**“Good Master, not me**

**I would never deceive you.**

**You’ve got it all wrong,**

**Only praise in my song**

**To you.**

**Never me, never me, never more,”**

**We call to God with empty words**

**And declarations beyond absurd.**

**“My child  
That is why I hang on this tree.  
Let me set you free,  
From the torment of your guilt,  
Muddy mind and soul of silt.  
My blood is your blood,  
Your sin, my sin.”**

**We simply do not have the authority,  
Nor the seniority  
To bargain with the Creator,  
Master of all that is.  
Our promise empty of truth  
With no validation or proof.  
Laden with lies and compromise.**

**So, instead of unkept promises  
Made by doubting Thomases,  
And cheapened vows,  
We seek the forgiveness  
That God offers with grace  
Through his love and compassion  
As we wallow in a world that begs us  
To believe we can play games with our God,  
Making deals with handshakes  
And empty words.  
Let us acknowledge our dirt,**

**And let God determine our worth  
By giving the life of his son  
On a cross  
Blood for our sin  
And sin for his blood  
Stripes on his back  
To buy us back  
Paying the ultimate cost,  
After we are lost.**

If you have never had someone break a promise to you, I would say you are unique among people. If you have never broken a promise to anyone, I'm afraid I would have a hard time believing you, though I would never tell you that. The old adage "Promises are made to be broken" rings true for most people. The promises we make are only as strong as our own character. I think that all of us understand that a broken promise is equivalent to broken trust. And once trust is broken in any relationship, it is difficult to regain that trust. Sometimes that bridge can never be rebuilt. It takes an extreme commitment on the part of both the maker of the promise and the person who was supposed to receive the benefit of the promise for trust to be restored. The problem we face is that people are prone to forget the kept promises, but they find it hard to let go of the broken promises. It nags at our brains. We will always wonder if the person who broke the promise can be trusted to keep a different promise down the line.

There are some extremely rational reasons that promises may be broken based on circumstances. The man who promises to pay back a loan by a given date but then loses his job. The woman who makes an appointment to meet with someone and is on her way but gets a flat tire. The child who promises their parents that they will mow the yard, but soon realizes it is much more difficult than they thought it would be. Most of us have every intention of keeping our promises. But sometimes, life gets in the way, and we run short of resources, energy, or time. And there are times when we overcommit ourselves only to realize a promise or two might just cause our plate to overflow and make a mess.

**We can also agree that when it happens to us, we can relate to the aggravation and frustration that it causes.**

**There are two ways we can deal with that kind of situation as recipients of a broken promises. We can be kind, understanding, compassionate, forgiving and patient. Or we can get angry and become retaliatory, demanding, and unforgiving, which may eventually destroy our relationship. Either way, we are forced to place a value on the relationship that otherwise might never have been tested. Promises tend to take the esoteric value of a relationship into the world of practical consideration.**

**We're human. We expect people to keep their promises to us. But as we grow older, we also become wiser and more discerning regarding the promises that people make to us. There are times when we are aware that when we lend money or things to people there is the probability that those items will never be returned to us. We know that we should lend generously and graciously as God intended, with no expectation of obligations being met.**

**We are a selfish species at heart. Most of us expect other people to forgive and work with us when we fall short of our own obligations, but we are not quite as understanding when others do it. We don't like being inconvenienced, or having to deal with circumstances when others fall short; when deadlines aren't met, when we feel we feel like we are being forced to dip into our barrel of grace and share with them, when our own selfishness tells that we shouldn't have to do that. After all, they made a promise to us and they should keep their promises to us.**



**There's that ugly word. "Should." It is our "shoulds" in life that cause us the most grief; when we expect people to behave the way we think they should; that they should measure up to our invisible standards that may or may not be based on the truths found in the teachings of Jesus Christ.**

**In Leviticus 25:1-13 we read about the year of Jubilee. The year of Jubilee occurred one year after 7 Sabbath years, or every 50<sup>th</sup> year. When the year of Jubilee rolled around, all debts were forgiven, all prisoners and slaves were set free. All land and property sales were prorated based on when the year of Jubilee occurred so that no one was taken advantage of. The farther away the next year of Jubilee, meant the higher the price of the property. The closer to the year of Jubilee the less expensive the property. This prorated system was based on the number of crops that could be produced before the Year of Jubilee occurred. Sounds like a great system, right? A time of second chances and renewed hope. But what happened is that landowners started refusing to sell their land as the Year of Jubilee approached. Those who normally lent money would not lend as the year of Jubilee got closer. All because they knew any debt would be forgiven when the year of Jubilee rolled around. They didn't want to lose money by having to forgive a debt.**

**We might think that is just smart business. But it defeated the purpose for the Year of Jubilee which was a time for renewing a balance in society between the rich and the poor. By refusing to transact business in those last few years before Jubilee, there was no way to rebalance the inequity in economy. The rich remained rich and poor just got poorer.**

Unfortunately, we often think like this, basing our charity on the return on investment. I think it is an important discussion and relates to our conversation about unkept promises and how we approach them. But I don't want to digress too far from the intent of this message where the focus is on promises that Jesus knows will not be kept, but forgives and even blesses those who are about to fail him. While the disciples are concerned about what Jesus is telling them is coming, he simply can't convince them of what lays ahead as he heads for the cross, bloody and beaten, a crown of thorns on his head. He can't get it through their head that there is a purpose in the approaching tragic moments, even when he is explaining that the result will be a "Year of Jubilee." All sins for all time will be forgiven. Prisoners set free. A point in time when rich and poor will be alike as they come before the throne of their Creator.

Picture this moment with Jesus and his disciples under the trees on the Mount of Olives. Christ has just blessed and presented the communion elements. Everyone had eaten the bread and drank the cup; even Judas, Thomas, and Peter. Yes, Peter, the focus of our study through this season. And this is what occurs:

**30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.**

**31 Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:**

**"I will strike the shepherd,**

**and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'**

**32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”**

**33 Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”**

**34 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”**

**35 But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.**

Peter leads the disciples in a declaration of loyalty, a promise to have Jesus' back no matter what happens. I guess, sometimes, we say what we think someone wants to hear. Maybe we don't even hear the words coming out of our own mouths. Or, possibly, we do and mean every word of it. But this is where the rubber hits the road, my friends. It is one thing to declare your love and loyalty to someone, and it is another thing to act on that declaration. Up until this point, the only sign that something might be wrong can be found in the words that Jesus has spoken to them all.

Let's be real about this. Just a few days prior, Jesus had entered Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, and throngs of people lined the road, praising him and laying palm leaves and their cloaks on the road before him. They shouted 'Hosanna' and called him king. How could things fall apart so quickly? They were all riding a monster wave, and nothing could stop them. Yet, Jesus is telling them that it is all going to come to an end. He is telling them that the honeymoon is over. Jesus is telling them that they are all about to scatter to the four winds leaving him to his fate, hang him out to dry.

And once again, without thinking, Peter opens his mouth:

**“Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”**

“Even if every other person here deserts you, I won’t. I will stick it out to the end with you. I won’t leave your side. I’ve got your back, buddy. You can count on me. You are stuck with me because I’m not going anywhere. If anyone tries to hurt you, they will have to go through me.”

And Jesus just shakes his head and looks at him with knowing eyes and says:

**“Truly I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”**

“This very night, Peter, you are going to tell people you don’t even know me. That I am a stranger to you. That you have never been seen with me. I know this. And I know the pain you are going to feel when that rooster crows and you realize what you have done.”

Peter is not unique in this way. We shouldn’t be too hard on him. He’s no different than most of us. It’s hard to find that person who is willing to walk into the fire with you. Everything seems true and great right up to the moment that real danger raises its head to strike; when people are called upon to face the overwhelming odds against you. Someone who will shout, “You take the thousand on the left and I will take the thousand on the right.”

Jesus is asking something much harder. What would be of comfort would be to have someone willing to stand with him and take the abuse and pain with

him. But he knew it was not meant to be. At the very least, he wanted his friends to stand by his side in support. But, he knew in his heart that this was something he had to do alone. But it must have cut Jesus to the bone knowing that his trusted friend Peter, who was standing here declaring his utmost loyalty to him, would, in just a few hours, tell people he had never met Jesus, that he didn't even know him.

**“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.**

“Oh, Peter. Why don't you drive that knife in a little deeper. Don't make promises you aren't going to keep. I know you are going to desert me. Please, don't make it worse by telling me that you will stand beside me. I'm facing enough pain, the pain of thousands, no millions, of people. Please don't add to that by making declarations that you will forget in just a few passing hours.”

Have you ever made one of those promises? It's certainly not like promising to pay back that \$20 dollars you borrowed. No, I'm talking about that promise that you will be there for someone through thick and thin, no matter the circumstances. That you will stand with someone in their darkest moment. Only, when that time comes, you are nowhere to be found! Have you ever had that happen to you, where you are facing one of the toughest moments of your own life, and you look over your shoulder for support, realizing that no one, not one single person is there? They don't answer your call. They have other things to do. Their promises were hollow and made in the spirit of the moment.

**It hurts. It hurts worse than the beating we take. The realization that friendships or relationships were really built on just so many words strung together with hot air, lacking substance. Broken promises. Broken trust. Broken relationships. Broken vows. Broken friendships. Broken. Broken. Broken.**

**And we stand alone against the onslaught.**

**But I told you in the beginning of this message that promises are not reciprocal instruments. They run only one direction. But there is hope here. Just because we break our promises before God, he will never break his promises to us.**

**“Never will I leave you;**

**never will I forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5**

**1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God ; believe also in me.**

**2 My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?**

**3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. John 14:1-3**

**28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.**

**29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.**

**30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?**

**31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'**

**32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.**

**33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

**34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matthew 6:28-34**

**When God tells us that he has our backs, when he makes his promises to us, he keeps them. Always. He never forgets. He never turns us away. He shows up. Even when we forget. Even when we break our promises to him and his children. And he expects us, as his children, forgiven and blessed, to forgive others when they break their promises to us, just as he forgives us.**

**God bless you all,**

**AMEN**

**Copyright © 2023 Rev. Walt Wellborn**

**Scripture references provided under copyright by:**

**THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION©, NIV© Copyright © 1973,  
1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. © Used by permission. All rights reserved  
worldwide.**