

**One of the agonizing problems in life is to not see the realization or fulfillment of promises. The Scriptures continually speak of the promises of love, joy, peace, abundant life and hope, but it doesn’t take much effort for a person to look around our world and in a sardonic expression, wonder where are all those promises. Sometimes in a panic we turn to the Bible and read and reread its pages, and what do we discover?**

**PEACE for Paul was found in persecution and prison.**

**JOY for Peter came to its fulfillment when he was crucified upside down.**

**ABUNDANT LIFE for Job resulted in all his possessions being taken away from him.**

**What are we to say of these things? God asks that you and I die with Christ so that we might rise with him to newness of life, yet we still assume all that really takes place is nothing more than that we die with Him. This does not paint a very pretty picture for most of us to admire.**

**If we are honest with ourselves, do we ask the soul searching questions: *Does all of this mean that these wonderful, self assuring promises are nothing more than simply being dangled before us, tempting us, luring us but never within our reach? Are they really nothing more than a very unique way in which to keep us on an even keel so that we may endure the journey of life?* If we truly believe in God, then a Christian is one who is confident that these promises are not something that are in the future but are God’s promises in the here and now. But where do these promises come from? The triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem should give us a way to face today realistically and offer some ways in which we can find workable solutions. The Old Testament is filled with fascinating stories about promises and certain disillusionment s of the people when those promises did not meet their expectations. The heaven-sent manna was not sweet but bitter and sour. The glorious promise of a land that would flow with milk and honey turned out to be a place where people worked hard with blood and sweat to fight for a livelihood. And those people who lived in the Promised Land felt the impact of other nations taking their land, their homes and putting their people into slavery. And from this land they were delivered again. What did the Promised Land afford this time? A return over the hot sands of the desert to find their cities destroyed: the tears and sweat started all over again. But those promises kept them going with greater dreams and great aspirations. The time had come. The Messiah was to arrive; the new heaven and earth would be here and God would finally step in and complete the fulfilment of all those previous frustrations with joy, hope and peace. In the picture we have of Palm Sunday, God came just as described for us, humble and mounted on a colt. Imagine how all the hopes and dreams were momentarily centred on that one important figure entering Jerusalem. But something happened. By Good Friday morning that stately tower, the symbol of hope, peace, joy and abundant life had collapsed. Again the old promises were not fulfilled to their expectations and the people shouted in disgust, *Crucify! We have no king but Caesar!* What happened? The answer I believe is relatively**

simple. The people had twisted and distorted what God promised into a jumbled mess to justify what they themselves had wanted God's promises to look like. They were so mixed up with their selfish motivations they were unable to recognize the actual promises of God when they came in the person of Jesus Christ, and they pushed the panic button. Their reaction was something like the blissful, starry-eyed love of young newlyweds. The promise of living happily ever after rings in their ears but then comes the fulfillment of that promise. Hair curlers and cosmetics. How different he or she looks in the morning. The stubbly beard, the ear piercing slurp of cereal, the mussed up newspaper, the squabbling children, the endless bills, the short tempers, the clashing of personalities. Then they may begin to think that if this is the abundant life, if this is living happily ever after - who needs it? And words of separation and divorce become real invitations and so do the temptations to break the sanctity of marriage along with the vows. The game was not being played the way they wanted or planned for it to be played.

The poor preacher from Nazareth was crowned with thorns, a helpless victim of cheap politicians and scheming, self-righteous spiritual leaders. He was the brunt of stupid and ignorant jokes by crude soldiers and on lookers. Here is the completion of a thousand years of promises and they want none of this kind of promise that His blood be upon their shoulders and upon their children.

**NOW HERE IS WHAT I BELIEVE IS THE REAL SHOCKER!** We are those children and we are no different now from the people of that day. If the peace we seek literally means many a sleepless night and tension over a willing involvement with the great issues of life; if joy means the pain that goes along with the heartache over the loss of a loved one; if abundant life means many years of suffering from some incurable ailment, then we might find ourselves looking elsewhere as did they. We want God's promises to look the way we want them to look. If it is not our way then we will walk away having difficulty in recognizing the promises of God when they do come. No wonder we find ourselves so apathetic, so frustrated, so uncertain of our faith and divided in our loyalty.

We call the crowd of Palm Sunday and Good Friday a fickle lot, one thing one minute and the next something else. Not so. The crowd on both days was frighteningly consistent. The fulfillment of the promised One to come did not meet their expectations and approval of the way they wanted God to come, so quite consistent human nature, the cry of blessing quickly changed to crucifixion. And we are there.

The promises of God and the subsequent rewards do not come cheaply. They are obtained from a tremendous price, the price of sacrifice. There is simply no other way than to turn to a complete trust in the wisdom of God and His way of love as made known from the cross of Calvary. It takes plain raw courage to admit that our thoughts are not always God's thoughts and His ways not always our ways. We must learn to let God be God.

**We all have dreams, we all have wants and sometimes they become our expectations. We want our children to grow up to be successful. We want our children to do well in school, be athletic, be tall, handsome or beautiful. We want them to marry a knight on a white horse or a fairy princess. We want the nice house, a nice pay cheque and the nice car and the boat and the furniture and the vacation. We want and we want and we want. TV, newspapers and magazines tell us what we should have and what we deserve - it is our right to have. Then we begin to expect and sometimes even demand, no matter what the cost.**

**Thank God that He is still God and that His goodness and blessings have not fallen into a giant processing plant. Thank God that not everyone gets the same size, shape and colour head of cabbage whether we want it or not. We must never forget that Hitler was going to put an exact same VW in everyone's driveway. It is good to know and to admit all this in faith. God knows where we are, who we are and what we have need of and when we need it. We do not take collector points of obedience, faith, discipline, sacrifice etc., and expect to trade them in on something from God's premium catalogue. Blessed is the person who today is unlike the crowd on Palm Sunday and Good Friday and can recognize the fulfillment of the promise when it does come. And may such a person respond in faith accordingly. And now as we receive the gifts of our God for His people, let us celebrate and rejoice. We serve a living Saviour. He's in the world day. Sing hallelujahs for He is a wonderful Saviour. Amen**