

"I Can and I Will: Stand"

Matthew 7:24-27

Psalms 37:3-5

### Invitation to the Proclamation

I began last Sunday introducing a focus for us this Lent and Easter. I began with the statement, "Enough is enough." When we find ourselves saying that in reference to enough turmoil, enough pain, enough heartache, enough... (you name it- humanitarian crises, war, hate), what we need is a solid foundation in which to stand and live. It suggests life's wrecking ball has been at the forefront and we are not sure we can take any more blows. The good news is that we have a place and a person to turn to for help and hope. The solid foundation in which we all need to be standing and living is God and God's promises. Over and over again in scripture we encounter texts and stories that reveal God saying, "I Can and I Will", and acting faithfully upon it. These texts will be our hope and our focus over the next six weeks as we seek to faithfully live into lent and lean in on God's promises. In God we can trust. In God we can stand. In God we can live.

Today we are going to begin with I Can and I Will: Stand and there is a great lesson Jesus teaches that serves as a great foundation in which to build:

### **Read Matthew 7:24-27**

As a visual person, one of the first images I thought of in relation to standing was the superhero pose. Have you ever noticed what superheroes are doing when they are presented in still images? Think about the Eternals, Justice League, or Avenger's. All of the superheroes are presented like rocks, standing firm, poised and ready, able and willing, to get in the game using their unique abilities.

I admit that you and I may not have the resources of Batman and Ironman, the herculean strength of Superman and Hulk, or the ability to fly like Wonder woman and Falcon, and we may not ever be asked to pose for a poster or cover for a movie, but you and I too are called to stand. Unlike the fictional heroics, we are called to stand, not as the rock but on the rock, who is poised and ready, able and willing, to get in the game. Our need to stand is not so much a physical uprightness as much as it is a spiritual uprightness, with our greatest resource, strength, and unique ability being faith in an incredible God who can and will stand firm for us and alongside us as our superhero.

Why would we stand in faith on the promises of God? Why not something else? Why not someone else? Because God can and God will unlike anyone or anything else. How do we know this? Because of God's covenant relationship with us. When God created his most beloved creation, humanity, God made a promise to love, provide, be present with, deliver,

and save. And all throughout the stories of God's interaction with humanity, the stories of the Old and New Testaments in Scripture, what we witness is that God doesn't renege on God's promises. Just like the early Israelites, Jews, and Gentiles, we are God's children. And because God has provided for his children from the beginning, we can believe God can and God will stand for us and alongside us today. Because God has remained steadfast in his promises, we can trust God to remain steadfast in those promises today. We can have hope in God. We can count on God to deliver. We can stand firm in God and build a life on God as our rock.

God can and God will stand, Amen. God is the light and there is no amount of darkness that can put out God's light. Can we? Will we? Stand on God's promises.

To answer can we or will we maybe we need to consider what it looks like to stand spiritually upright in God. We have touched on it briefly but the words of Psalm 37:3-5 paint a clear picture for us.

**Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.  
Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.  
Commit your way to (Stand firm in) the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.**

If we are to dig a little deeper on what these words mean, we can consider what an artist shares in an introduction to the song "The Benediction" by Awakening. The artist reflects on what it means to delight in the Lord as spoken in Psalm 37:4 and says,

"One translation says, keep company with God and get in on the best. Open up before God and keep nothing back, He will do whatever needs to be done. Delighting in the Lord is like having a childhood superhero you look up to. You put a pillowcase or blanket around your neck and run around pretending to fly. You follow so passionately after Him that only being in his likeness satisfies you.... When you delight in God, God brings, and God delivers.... To commit to God is committing all our ways, thoughts, methods, ideologies, concepts, perspectives- all committed, and father filtered. So, God," the artist states, "I am going to do the natural and you can do the super. I will do what I can because I know you will do what I can't."

What the Psalmist is revealing is that trusting, doing good, taking delight, and committing our way is what it means to "STAND." When we trust, do good, take delight, and commit our way to God, the byproduct is "God will act." It doesn't say God may act. It says when we stand in faith in God and on God's promises, "God will act."

Can we? Yes, we can. We can trust. We can do good. We can delight in God. We can commit our way. We can stand firm in God. Will we? What is your answer? I hope it is yes, with God's help, because enough is enough, right? Something has got to change, and we know we can't

do it on our own. Life's wrecking ball is relentless, and we need a solid rock in which to stand and build our life.

Last fall and early in 2022, Gary and Beth Williams taught a class on Sunday mornings using Max Lucado's book *Unshakable Hope*. The readings and discussions are actually where the focus of standing on the promises of God is rooted this Lent and Easter. We will hear many different quotes and stories from that book over the next several weeks, but there was one particular question Lucado poses that I found paramount. He asks, "Is what I am hooked to stronger than what I'll go through?"

Only a teenager, April shares of a time when the walls of a hospital echoed her cries. She was with her family, and they refused to leave her mother's side while she fought for her life. April had been fighting to be strong for her family so long and felt as though she had nothing left. "Everything I held dear to me had been shattered by life's wrecking ball, and my world was in ruins. I didn't know how much more of life's hard knocks I could take." At a family meeting her dad in his forthright personality shared, "We have no more money. You and your brother will have to find a way to pay for your education yourselves next year or you won't be able to return to college." Another blast of dynamite. "Even if I worked all summer, I could never come up with enough to pay for an entire year of school." College had been April's dream since she was 10 and she had grown to love everything about her new life- independence, classes, campus, friends. The thought of postponing her dream brought more tears to her eyes. April shares, "I was scared, but I wasn't going to let fear overrule my reason. I knew that if God wanted me to remain in school he would provide a way. My foundations were shaken, but my trust in God did not collapse. God would take care of me and place me where I needed to be." A short time passed, and life's wrecking ball hit again as she returned home to visit her great grandmother who was dying. While at home, April received a phone call that her brother's best friend and college roommate, and childhood neighbor she would play with as well, had been in a serious car accident. April found herself knocked to her knees in devastation. Two months later, April found herself back at the hospital. It was the day of her brother's best friend's funeral. April's mom began to run a fever that became a cold that became pneumonia. Despite treatment, her mother did not get better. The virus she had settled in her heart and the doctors told her the only thing keeping her alive was her will to live. April's world had been completely shattered and the wrecking ball had won. Ashes settled around April and she couldn't help but wonder, "When was this destruction going to end?"

Hurting and bleeding, April stood in faith and experienced God's compassion, peace, and strength. She promised to trust God no matter what happened.

Her mom was released from the hospital, but almost an invalid. She moved home from college and found the family almost bankrupt. Together they prayed and stood on the

promise of God to provide. "God has seen us through this far and God won't abandon us now." And God was faithful. People from the church and neighborhood brought meals, cleaned the house, and took care of the lawn. Their generosity allowed the bills to be paid. Scholarships were awarded to April and her brother to attend school with a full ride. The most remarkable of God's gifts came when her mother, who couldn't take a shower or walk to the bathroom, began to improve to the point of being almost fully healed. April shares, "Tough times are never fun to go through, but they are powerful teaching tools. My faith in God has grown very strong. When life had stripped me of everything, God never left my side. God was all I had left, and even though everything else was crashing around me, God never moved. God gave me strength when I had none; God gave me peace in my darkest moments. When life knocked me down, God held me up. Life's wrecking ball would never be able to crack or crumble God's faithfulness to me. God is the solid rock."

Psalm 62:6 says, "**God alone is my rock and my salvation; God is my fortress, I will not be shaken.**" Perhaps we can all take this verse and post it on the doorposts of our hearts, minds, houses, and office buildings.

Our focus in worship this Lent and Easter would be incomplete without the hymn "Standing on the Promises of God", so we are going to be singing it each week as our sending hymn. And since we are going to be singing it, I thought I would give you it's foundation.

In 1864, Russel Kelso Carter was 15 years of age and a gifted athlete and student. Starting as an instructor at the Pennsylvania Military Academy in 1869, he then led a diverse and fruitful life including stints as a minister, medical doctor, and song writer. What makes Russel Kelso Carter relevant though is his understanding of God's promises. By age 30, Carter had a critical heart condition and was on the brink of death. It is written of Carter: "He knelt and made a promise that healing or no, his life was finally and forever, consecrated to the service of the Lord. From that moment on, scripture took on a new life for Carter and he began to lean on the promises that he found in the Bible. He committed himself to believe, whether or not God granted him healing... Carter lived, with a healthy heart, for another 49 years." Carter's decision to trust God (stand), in the midst of difficulties gave birth to the hymn, *Standing on the Promises of God*.

The words Carter wrote serve as a powerful reminder and charge for us even today. We too can stand on the promises of God. We too can build our life on the promises of God. Since God's promises are unbreakable, our hope will be unshakable. The winds will still blow. The rain will still fall. But in the end we will be standing- standing on the promises of God. (Max Lucado, *Unshakable Hope*, 165)

Let all God's people say... Amen.

## Invitation to the Table

To stand spiritually upright, we all need to be nourished and strengthened. God gives us then Christ's table, which serves as a reminder to us of God's love and mercy and God's ability to turn the natural into supernatural. It is written and told that when Jesus was at table with the people, he took bread, blessed it, and broke it, and when they ate it, their eyes were opened.

May our eyes be opened today to God's love and mercy, God's ability to be super, and may we stand on the rock, poised and ready, able and willing, to get in the game.