

“You Are Stamped with Gods Image”

By Chris Rowlett

Excerpts from Max Lucado’s book *Unshakeable Hope*

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As Pastor Heather and I contemplated what we should focus on this fall, in the midst of everything going on in our community, country and world, she gave me a catalog from Cokesbury with many different series by different authors. As I leafed through the catalog, I reviewed some of the highlighted pages that she had reviewed. As I continued on and reviewed the different options, one book that was very small in print stood out from the page. One reason is obvious, it had a lighthouse on the front. But as I looked further and read the title “Unshakable Hope: Building Our Lives on The Promises of God”, the title spoke to me and Pastor Heather as well. I pulled up a sample of the book and started reading it right away. I was in my church office reading this as I was waiting on members from the Redemption House to arrive for their graduation ceremony. I was so moved by the first chapter that I asked Tomi if I could share a little bit of it during the ceremony. She said that would be wonderful. As I entered the sanctuary, I looked up and saw the banners on the front walls. Both banners spoke about “Hope”, at that point I knew that God wanted us to focus on his “Unshakeable Hope” and “Promises” this fall.

As I read the first chapter of Max Lucado’s book “God’s Great and Precious Promises” the author starts with this scripture from 2 Peter 1:4 “God has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.” He goes on to say that a student of scripture spent a year and a half in an attempt to tally the number of promises God has made to humanity. He came up with 7,487 promises in the Bible. God’s promises to us are abundant, like pine trees in the Rocky Mountains that are unbending and perennial. God’s promises are positive, some give us the assurance of blessings and some of them are negative and give a guarantee of consequences. All of God’s promises are binding, for not only is God a promise maker, our God is a promise keeper.

Max Lucado talks about the promise that God makes to the Israelites as he prepares them for a new land. Exodus 14:10 states: “Then the Lord said “I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you.” He goes on to say, “that God did not emphasize the Israelites’ strength. He emphasized his. He did not underscore their ability; he highlighted his. He equipped them for the Journey by headlining his capacity to make and keep his promises.”

As we read this, how does it speak to you? As I read, it got me to thinking. God made promises to the Israelites and said “I will do wonders to show all how awesome is the work that I do.” Notice that God is still working through the Israelites but is asking that in turn that they would only give the glory to God. How often do we get caught up in the race of life; the keeping up with the other guy or girl? How often do we do something awesome and pump our chest or stand up a little taller as we receive praise. When I was a little boy, I remember that first time I launched off on my bike and there was no longer a hand on the back of my seat. I was doing it on my own. I was yelling. “Look at me I am pedaling all on my own.” As a little boy I was childish though. As an adult and a child of God I need to point towards God more often. It is

time for me to put away my childish ways and give the glory and praise to God. God will grant us promises and he never breaks a promise; it is not in his nature. In return, we as God's people, are asked to give Him back the glory. It is through this that people will start to wonder who is this God that they are giving thanks to and why do they give him the glory instead of taking for themselves.

"Unshakable Hope", what does that mean and how can we have that. As we delve into Max Lucado's book we will start to find some of the answers. But as we continue through the first chapter a question appears: "Could you use some unshakeable hope?" He continues on to talk about suicide increasing dramatically, and I cannot imagine where it is now with the time that we are in. We are more educated, we have tools and technology better than our parents and grandparents ever had, we have more recreation and entertainment than ever before. Then how could this be? One answer could be that we have a lack of Hope. Max states that many people believe that this world is as good as it gets, and let's face it. It's not that good. But here is the good news, People of the Promise have an advantage. They are determined to ponder, proclaim, and pray the promises of God. Imagine filtering things through God's word and his promises. A problem arises and you turn to one of God's promises and remember "but God said..." When a struggle threatens, turn to scripture and remember what God said. When comforting others, turn to scripture and point out what God says in his promises about what they are going through. The Bible serves as a shelf of remedies full of prescriptions in God's promises. Psalms 25:14 "Friendship with God is reserved for those who reverence him. With these alone he shares the secrets of his promises."

I am going to close chapter one with these words from the beginning of the chapter and I had not thought of the heroes in this way before but listen: "The heroes of the Bible came from all walks of life: rulers, servants, teachers, doctors. They were male, female, single, married. Yet one common denominator united them: they built their lives on the promises of God. Because of God's promises, Noah believed in rain before rain was a word. Because of God's promises, Abraham left a good home for one he had never seen. Because of God's promises, Joshua led two million people into enemy territory. Because of God's promises, David conked a giant. Peter rose from the ashes of regret, and Paul found a grace worth dying for."

Genesis 1:26 God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature, so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of the Earth." Just think of those words for a moment. What is God truly saying in this passage. Yes, you can see that he created human beings to rule over all of the animals, birds, cattle, all moving things on the Earth. But what is most important in this passage? God created us, yes, you and me to reflect His image. Think about that for a moment. God created US to be more like Him than anything else he made. That is significant, God did not create the fish in his image. God did not create the birds in His image, the Bible does not tell us that He created the planets in His image, the stars in His image, the only thing created in God's image was you and me. We are made in His image and His likeness!

As I look at the Rose Bowls on the alter in the sanctuary and in the Lighthouse Worship Center and think about the expectant families and new babies that we have in our congregation it helps me to grasp being created in God's image. I remember when my daughters were babies people saying things like "she has your eyes" or "Oh, Elaine she has curls in her hair like you did

as a baby". We have a likeness to our parents and also to our family. How many times have you seen a family reunion and could tell that they were all related? Maybe the family has a certain nose, or hair color, or eye color, is tall, or short, they all have a certain likeness or resemblance. As we look at the families that are expectant of a new baby, think about the infant. The family already loves the baby before it is even born. The family has never seen the baby, never heard the coos, or gaga, have not seen their precious eyes, have not held her or him. But they love the baby. Why? They love the baby because he or she carries some of them in him or her. In the same way God loves us and would do anything for us because we carry part of God in us. This begins to help us shape an understanding of why God loves us so much.

Sin enters in and makes our likeness to God blurry or hard to see. We become victims to our own self-promotion from what society tells us daily, instead of us being God promoters. How many commercials, ads in magazines or newspapers or movies have we seen that are about self-promotion? But as I read from Max's words, "The New Testament describes a progressive work of God to shape us into his image. As we fellowship with God, read his Word, obey his Commands, and seek to understand and reflect his character, something wonderful emerges. Or, better stated *someone* wonderful emerges. God comes out of us. We say things God would say. We do things that God would do. We forgive, we share, and we love." Picture this as if God has picked up an old penny, you know like the one on the floor of your car that is coated in all that yuck. It hardly even resembles a penny, but then he begins to wipe it off and shine it up and an image begins to appear. God's plan for us is to wipe away anything that is not of him in us, so that the image of him can be clearly seen in us.

During these difficult times and with all of the things happening in our communities and others around the country, I have a few final thoughts from Chapter 2, "You are God's idea. God's Child. Created in God's image. Would you let this truth find its way into your heart? You were conceived by God before you were conceived by your parents. You were loved in heaven before you were known on Earth. You aren't an accident." I really think that we understand these next words but sometimes we tend to forget them, listen to what Max says, "Would you let this truth define the way that you see other people? *Every* person you see was created by God to bear his image and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. This means that all people deserve to be seen for who they are: image bearers of God." Our world would be a much different place if these two truths would rest on more people's hearts.

We were made by God to know him and make him known. We are not here to be like that little boy I was years ago saying, "Look at me! I can ride my bike!" Isn't it time that we all grew up? You and I were made by God to live a life that says, "Look at God!" People outside the walls of Calvary should be able to look at us and not see us but see the image of our Maker. This is God's plan, and this is God's promise! Amen!