

“Promises” 2 Corinthians 1:20

This morning I want to talk about promises.

In Matthew 5 Jesus speaks about taking oaths, or making promises, and how people would swear by the gods or something else that they would do such and such a thing. Jesus said, don't do that. Let your “yes” be yes and your “no” no. In other words, be careful when you make promises, do not make them lightly, and then keep your word. Be people of integrity.

I remember that some of the hardest words to hear from the children as they were growing up were, “But you promised.” If they were say that it meant that I had promised to do something with them, or get them something, and now plans had changed. Maybe we were going to go somewhere, to a restaurant, a movie, the mall, and something had come up and now plans had to change. So with puppy dog eyes, or clenched fists, the kids would come to me and say, “But you promised.”

As hard as I tried to keep my promises here were always those times when things just didn't work out...

This morning I want to remind us that when God makes a promise he never fails to fulfill what he said he would do. And I want us to hear the amazing truth this Christmas Sunday that the answer to all God's promises can be found in one place: Jesus. This is why Christmas is so important – the true story of Christmas that takes us to a manger where we find Jesus. As CS Lewis says, the birth of Jesus is “the central event in the history of the earth.” (Joyful Christian, p. 53)

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 1, where we find the Apostle Paul explaining to the church in Corinth why he was not coming right away for a visit. No doubt he was getting the message back from the church members, “But you promised.”

In his defense of his integrity, explaining that his yes means yes and his no means no, he tells us an important truth about the promises of God.

To fully understand what Paul is saying I want to read the full context of our focus verse today, so follow along as I read 1 Corinthians 1:12-24, focusing on verse 20.

Did you hear what God says through the Apostle? “No matter how many promises God has made, they are “yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” I spoken by us to the glory of God.”

“Amen” means, “So be it.” When we end a prayer with the word, “Amen” we are saying we desire that what we have prayed will come to pass – “So be it.” And we can pray that with confidence that God will answer our prayers as we pray according to His will.

Did you catch what the Holy Spirit says through Paul just before that? “No matter how many promises God has made they are “yes” in Christ.”

Think about that for a moment. Think about the Christmas story, for instance, and remember how many times we say this fulfilled. When you read Matthew’s account of the Christmas story you will find this words time and time again, “so that Scripture might be fulfilled.” This was Matthews’s way of saying, “all God’s promises are being fulfilled in Jesus.”

Go to Matthew chapter 1 and you will find a long list of names to start his book. It is the genealogy of Jesus through his adoptive father, Joseph. It is abbreviated, but the point is clear: Jesus is connected to both Abraham and King David.

Why is this important?

God made a promise to Abraham that through him there would come a great nation, so large that it would be like the grains of sand on the beach or the stars in the sky for numbers. At that time Abraham did not even have one child. We know how God gave Sarah, Abraham’s wife, a son named Isaac and so it appeared God’s promise was being fulfilled. That family would grow, and would become the nation of Israel.

Yet that still was not a nation so large it could not be counted. That would come through Jesus. Jesus spoke of the new people of God, the kingdom of God, formed by all who put their faith in him for salvation. This was a continuation of the nation formed by Abraham, meaning Jews were welcome to be a part of this new people of God, but it would embrace so many more people groups. All nations were now welcome to be a part of God’s new people, the followers of Jesus, Christians, the church.

Think about how that has grown. From a handful of disciples to over 2.5 billion followers of Jess today, the number of those who have found salvation through faith in Jesus is staggering. It is unlikely that there were even 2.5 billion people on the whole planet when Abraham lived!

What was the key to the fulfillment of this promise to Abraham? The coming of Jesus. He is the “yes” of God to Abraham.

God also promised to David that he would always have a member of his family sit on the throne. What a challenge as families came and went, leaders changed hands every few years and the promise to David seemed to be threatened. But then Jesus came, and he established a throne in love, and he came to be Lord of all. We know that Jesus died and rose to life again, never to face death again. He conquered death once and for all. So his throne is an eternal throne. Jesus is Lord, and will always be Lord. This is God’s “Yes” to the promise made to David.

Matthew, in his Gospel, tells of the promise God made through Isaiah that a virgin would bear a son, and he would be called Emmanuel. As impossible as that may have sounded, it was fulfilled in Jesus.

Through the prophet Micah God said that the Saviour would be born in Bethlehem. We know how a census by a Roman governor took Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem where Jesus would be born. This was to fulfill the promise God made so long ago.

Hosea 11:1 says that God would call his son out of Egypt. Matthew 2 tells us how Joseph fled to Egypt for safety when Herod tried to kill the infant Jesus, but would return to Judea, to a town called Nazareth, when things were safe once again. Out of Egypt Jesus came to grow up in Judea, and he would be called a Nazarene, the branch, just as Isaiah foretold.

I could walk you through dozens of scriptures fulfilled by the birth of Jesus. Each one reminds us that God is faithful, and will always keep his promises. And all the promises God has made find their fulfillment in Jesus.

During Jesus' life we find Jesus making promises that sometimes sounded unbelievable. For instance, Jesus is talking to the religious leaders and he says in John 2:9 that if they destroy the temple he will raise it up again in three days. At that moment Jesus is in the beautiful Temple courts, a temple that had taken 46 years to build. To suggest he could rebuild it in three days seemed preposterous to the religious leaders. The reality was, Jesus was talking about his body as the temple of God, the place where God lived and was worshipped, not the building made of wood and stone. And we know that after Jesus was put to death and buried in a tomb, on the third day he rose to life again. The temple of his body was destroyed, but on the third day it was rebuilt! God kept his promise through Jesus.

We could walk through all of Jesus' life and find promise after promise that God fulfilled in Christ.

In Ezekiel 11:19 the prophet saw a day when God would take hearts of stone and make them hearts of flesh. The image is of a person who has rejected God, and their hearts are like stone. But God would change that, and would bring new life, or a heart of flesh, to people once again. How would he do that? Through Jesus. When Jesus speaks to Nicodemus in John 3 and says he must be born again, he was showing the way God would turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. Once again, God's promise is fulfilled in Jesus.

In John's first letter to the churches he says that "God has promised to us eternal life." (1 John 2:25). What a wonderful promise, knowing that death will not get the last word in our lives, but we can live forever. But how is this possible?

We go back to that conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, and it is there that Jesus says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him will not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) It is through faith in Jesus that we receive eternal life. Jesus alone can forgive sin – the cause of spiritual death – and cleanse it from our lives. Faith believes he will "forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And in that act of grace we receive eternal life.

Which leads us to another wonderful promise, found in John 14. "Let no your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there you may be also." (vss. 1-3)

Do you hear the promises of God here?

First, Jesus is preparing a place for us. What a wonderful hope that there is a place in heaven prepared for each one of us. Not only is there room in heaven for everyone who puts their faith in Jesus, somehow Jesus has prepared a place just for us. What a wonderful hope.

I pause to think about how important that promise is as we reflect on the brevity of life. Just this past year we experienced the deaths of several members of the church. Was that the end of the journey for them? Will their burial mean that is the end? The answer is a resounding "NO" because Jesus has promised he had prepared a place in heaven for them. The fulfillment of this promise is found in Jesus.

And what else did Jesus say in this passage? "I will come again."

This morning I could have walked through hundreds of promises that were fulfilled in Jesus. I leave you with one more promise, that is yet to be fulfilled. Yet we have seen how in Christ all the other promises have come to pass. So we know this one also will take place.

Friends, Jesus is coming again. He promised.

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." (Rev. 22:12)

All God's promises are "Yes" in Jesus, so we know that his coming soon is also true. You can count on it.

Better yet, live in readiness for that wonderful day. "No man knows the day or the hour" so we must live in readiness every single day of our lives. As we look at all the troubles in our world these days there is a feeling that the coming of Jesus could be very soon. We say, "Maranatha!" (Our Lord come)

So as you plan your new year, you may have in mind a trip to Disneyland, or Hawaii or some other wonderful destination with the kids. As you make your plans, you may want to tell your family, "We will go – if the Lord carries!"

This morning I encourage you to read your Bibles and see how many promises of God were fulfilled by Jesus. And then remember, there are a few promises still to be fulfilled – the return of Jesus, eternal life and a home in heaven. We know we can count on them being fulfilled as all God's promises are "yes" in Christ. The key is, we must be in Christ.