

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

The Promises of God – Joss Bray

1.11.15

Over the next few weeks we will be doing a teaching series on the promises of God. This was sparked by something we heard at the Devoted conference this year. Jeremy Simpkins encouraged us to remember God's promises.

So what are these promises – and why are they important?

Because they come from God

If God says something – it is true! If he says that he will do something – he will do it! If he that says something will happen – it will happen!

It is as simple as that in one sense. But we need to grasp it with all our hearts and with all of our mind. It is easier to live by sight than by faith. It's easy to lose sight of promises that were made a long time ago and haven't been fulfilled yet that require faith. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:7

For we live by faith, not by sight.

Promises that God makes are always kept – in 2 Corinthians 1:20 says -

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

In fact, Jesus is the evidence of the promises and the fulfilment of God's promises. If we look to him, we will never be disappointed.

Remember that he is the king on the throne of the whole universe – all things are put under his feet. There is no entity that opposes him or us which can come anywhere close to his authority and power. Therefore, we can be sure that he both wants to keep his promises and that he is able to keep his promises. These are not earthly promises – they are direct from heaven.

Notice that we can say "amen" which actually means "So be it; truly". It is a declaration of affirmation - it means we agree that something is true and declare that we believe it will come to pass. Amen is a powerful word – perhaps we should be more confident in using it. So for example - If we agree with someone's prayer and believe God will answer it – then let's give a big amen. This of course can be quietly or loudly – but it is an amen and as we have read, it is spoken by us to the glory of God.

What is the effect of his promises?

They mean something very important for us - 2 Peter 1:3 says -

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

So as a result of his glory and goodness, he has given us these very great and precious promises - so that we can become more like him. When we look to God and listen to him and take seriously what he has said, then the world starts to lose its grip on us. We escape the things and desires that we were enslaved to and which still trip us up at times.

Do we want to live a godly life? God has given us everything we need for it. We don't need to go searching elsewhere for experiences, or exciting new teaching - it's all here – in God's word. It's all been given to us through the Holy Spirit.

So here is an example of Jesus fulfilling what his father had promised. In John 14 v 16 he says -

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Clearly his father was pleased to hear from his son and do what he asked because in Luke 24:49 Jesus says -

I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

And we know that this happened and continues to happen now. The power came at Pentecost and we have this same Holy Spirit – the spirit of Jesus living in us. Even though he is not physically walking on the earth, with us, he is with us fulfilling that promise.

This is what Jesus said in Matthew 28:8 before he ascended into heaven-

Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

What a promise! Probably the best promise ever.

What other promises does God give?

There are so many promises in the bible in the old and new testament. Here are just a few to remind us how amazing God is.

Old testament promises

So for example, in the old testament God promised to bless Abraham and, through his descendants, the whole world in Genesis 12:2–3. This promise was called the Abrahamic Covenant and it pointed to the coming Messiah that Abraham himself was looking for (John 8:56). And we know that this actually happened when Jesus came and fulfilled the messianic prophecies that run all through the Jewish scriptures.

And remember that the promise of God to Abraham and his wife Sarah seemed absurd because they were so old – yet it all came to pass. If God says it – it will happen – it may not be in the way or the timing that we would expect – but it will happen.

Also from the old testament - Jeremiah 29:11 -

For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

God’s plans are God’s promises. Because of his great love for us, our future and hope are secure in him. Even when we feel so hard pressed and under pressure, when we can’t see the next step or even imagine any way out of a difficult situation. That is when we can know the truth of God’s promises the most.

Isaiah 40:29 says-

He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

New testament promises

So in the new testament – remember for a start that everything Jesus said was a promise. So when he said this in John 14:27 -

I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.

He actually meant it. Are you looking for peace? Have you had enough of worrying or being fearful? Here is the promise of Jesus – for you and me. This is a gift the world cannot give – although many think it can.

If you are tired and worn out, then look in Matthew 11:28 -

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

At the root of God’s promises to us is his love for us. Paul found this out in practice. He came through extreme trials and suffering, he was still able to say in Romans 8:37 -

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Not only can we never lose the love of God, he also loves to give us what we need. Paul tells the church in Philippians 4:19 -

And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

These are all promises of God that we can be absolutely sure of and we can live in them and by them. Remember that we should live by faith and not by sight. We can remind him of his promises. There is absolutely nothing wrong with saying to him – you promised this in your word - and then hearing what he says and seeing what he does.

Remember that he is a heavenly father who wants communication with his children! It isn’t testing God as such, or telling him off because he hasn’t done something we expected. Rather it is being obedient to him by trusting him and his promises – and taking them seriously.

We all need reminding of this at times – but that is why God has put us together as church to do just that. We have the bible which is full of these promises. Let’s read it more! Let’s delight in it! Let’s claim the promises of God as the basis for our lives.

Just to be clear, this is not the same as the name it and claim it philosophy that sometimes appears in churches. This can descend into focussing on getting things or money or outcomes that people want, rather than focussing on God and some very important principles that are a lot more important in the kingdom than these things.

We can’t claim anything from God – but he loves to freely give us good gifts. That is the difference – he knows what his plan is and what we need as well. We can trust him in that – and in his timing.

So what about personal promises from God?

There are times when we feel God is speaking to us about things that are personal to us. Many of us will be carrying things around that we feel God has spoken to us. Words of encouragement, words about our future, words about our family or the church for example.

Here it can get a bit tricky – and it is probably a subject for another talk – or a few talks. Prophetic words are God speaking to us for strengthening, encouragement and building up. We are told to eagerly desire the gift of prophecy. So clearly that is what we should do.

All I would say now is that these promises should be in line with scripture – the established word of God. They should be checked out with someone else who has a prophetic gift. Prophetic words are not 100% accurate – that is why the bible talks about others people weighing them when they are brought.

People can get led off the right path sometimes by believing that they have heard something from God – indeed a promise from God – that turns out not to be so. So again – that is why God put us together in church to help each other in this. Because if it is of God, when it is weighed and others agree, faith rises, vision comes and we and therefore the church are built up. Things then get exciting!

The most important promise of God

This is the most pressing issue for all of us. We are told in Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

So there is a statement and then there is a promise of God. The statement of truth is that sin leads to death. Sin is ignoring God and going our own way. This path leads to death. Quite a stark and uncomfortable truth. But the fact is that Jesus would not have needed to come and pay the price for that sin in our lives if it wasn't true. He took the punishment that should have been ours. He opened the way back to God the father that had been shut because of our disobedience.

But then we have the promise of God – the free gift of eternal life. So in Romans 10:9 here is what we need to do to claim that free gift -

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

If you haven't done this – this is the time to do it – this is the opportunity. Believe that Jesus is the son of God and Lord of everything. Believe that God showed this to be true by raising him from the dead.

Then confess it - speak it out – and you will be saved. It is as simple as that - but the most important thing you will ever do because your eternal destiny rests on it.

If you have already done this, then remember that there is another promise of God – that he has promised to finish the work He started in us - Philippians 1:6 says this -

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Let's hold on to the promises we that have been given as children of our heavenly father. Let's live in the hope and faith that he gives us. Let's be transformed and grow as he finishes the work he has started in us.

Amen!