

A Promise Made... A Promise Kept
Andrew Kneeland, November 28, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When's the last time you made a promise? Have you ever promised to be on time for a meeting? Or promise to repay a loan? Or promise to keep a secret?

Did you keep your promise? Have you always kept your promises? Probably not. We're not the best at keeping our promises.

But fortunately our God is a much better promise-keeper than we are. God's Word is full of promises, and he keeps every single one of them. All of God's promises are kept, all of the time.

We're looking at a promise from the book of Jeremiah today, this first Sunday of the church year. It's the season of Advent now! We can officially listen to Christmas music. It's "legal" now! Advent is a word that means "arrival," and this season of Advent is the time where we remember *God's* arrival; God's birth as a baby in Bethlehem.

We remember Jesus' arrival by looking *back* in time, but Jeremiah lived 600 years before Christ. He looked *ahead* to God's arrival, as a prophet.

Now, it's important to know that when God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, he gave him two jobs: to give the people words that tear down, and to give the people words that build up. Words of accusation and conviction... and words of promise and hope. Jeremiah was a Law and Gospel prophet.

Much of the first part of this book of Jeremiah is sermon after sermon of Jeremiah calling the Israelites out for their unfaithfulness to God. Words of accusation telling them to stop sinning, repent, and turn back to God. God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt and given them this beautiful land of Israel to live in, but they were breaking their promise to God. They weren't honoring him. They *weren't* worshiping God, they were building altars to the false gods of the region. They *weren't* caring for the widows and orphans among them, they were ignoring them and oppressing them.

The people of Israel would go make a sacrifice to the false god Baal in the morning and then attend temple in the afternoon as if nothing were wrong.

Blatant hypocrisy. Blatant unfaithfulness.

God had promised to take care of his people, but his people hadn't kept their end of the deal. So God allowed the powerful nation of Babylon to come in, destroy Jerusalem, and take the people of Israel into captivity for 70 years.

Jeremiah saw all this happen. He had given plenty of words of warning to the people, but they didn't listen. Here in chapter 33 the people are captives in a foreign land, like how they were in Egypt. And the question on the hearts and minds of the Israelites was this: "What would God do now?"

Would he wipe them out because of their sin? They deserved to be wiped out! Would he ignore their sin—like brushing dirt under a rug, or shoving clutter into a hall closet—and let them go back to Jerusalem and carry on as if nothing had changed? He wouldn't be a very just God if he let that happen, would he? But what about God's promise?

This passage in Jeremiah is just a few verses so I want to read it again this morning. But imagine you're an Israelite, living in captivity after years of disobedience and unfaithfulness, and you're eagerly waiting to hear what God has to say about you.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' "For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever."

Dear God, this was your Word to the Israelites living in Babylon, and this is your word to us today. Bless us as we look at it, help us understand and apply its truth. Your word is always truth, God. In your name we pray, amen.

The message Jeremiah brings to God's people here in chapter 33 is that God

won't let sin have the final word. Sin won't have the final word. He is a promise-making God, and he will *always* keep his promises. So here in chapter 33 Jeremiah shifts from giving words of Law to words of Gospel. From words that tear down to words that build up.

He delivers God's message. Verse 14: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah."

What promise? He doesn't say... he just says "the promise." God means ALL of the promises. The promise to defeat Satan once and for all? "The day is coming." The promise to give Israel a perfect land where they'll enjoy perfect peace? "The day is coming." The promise to send a Rescuer to save Israel from their sin? "The day is coming."

Jeremiah gave the sorrowful and mourning Israelites a word of hope that was like a candle in a dark cave. The broken and battered Israelites were in no position to bargain with God. They had totally and completely failed...they had totally and completely abandoned the God who had saved them and rescued them and delivered them. But Jeremiah gives them a word to build them back up. To give them hope. To tell them that even though things are bleak now, and it looks like there's no hope, and no chance... "The day is coming."

The promises WILL be fulfilled, Jeremiah says. And they will be fulfilled by a person who comes from King David's family tree. Do you know who that is? Jesus is the answer! Jesus is how God kept his promises!

Jeremiah is looking ahead to when Jesus would ARRIVE. Verse 15 says when the Messiah comes he will "execute justice and righteousness." This could have scared the Israelites! If God was going to be just, surely he would punish sin. Surely he wouldn't simply brush aside the past and present and future sins of his people.

But how could God *justly* deal with our sin? How could he destroy sin once and for all without destroying us, who are just full of sin?

Jesus is how. Jesus was born as a man so that he would experience life just as we experience it. Experience temptations and trials and struggles and challenges

and grief just like we do. Because only a true human can be a substitute for another human, and only the true God can provide such a valuable sacrifice that it can be offered to not just one person, or ten people, or a thousand people... but the entire world.

God didn't brush aside sin. He dealt with it by giving it all to Christ. Christ took upon himself the consequences of all sins; everyone's certificates of default were given to Christ. Christ brings justice and righteousness. Even though we don't deserve it.

And listen again to the end of verse 16: "The Lord is our righteousness." We're in this story, too. This doesn't just apply to the Israelites living in captivity in Babylon thousands of years ago. This is OUR righteousness! Galatians says that if you believe in Christ you are a descendent of Abraham and an heir of the promise, THIS promise.

You are Judah and you are Jerusalem. You have been saved, and you can now dwell securely, because Christ has ARRIVED. He came not to overthrow the political rulers, not to simply give us some advice or examples on how to live, but Christ came to defeat the devil. He came to defeat sin, and he came to defeat death.

He came to be a conquering king. Verse 17 says "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne." That means that Christ will be a king like King David, who defeated his enemies and gave his people peace and rest. But Jesus is a better king than King David. Jesus is an eternal king, a perfect king. He permanently and decisively and ultimately defeated ALL of our enemies to give us—his people—perfect peace, and perfect rest.

Our eternal king isn't like any earthly king. He isn't concerned about making money or maintaining alliances or gathering political support. OUR king's only concern and only priority is US. He lives to keep you eternally safe.

And Christ also came to be our high priest. Verse 18 says "The Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings." Jesus will be a high priest like the Levitical priests of the Old Testament, who offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the people so their sins would be forgiven and their relationship

with God would be restored. But Jesus is better.

The sacrificial system in the Old Testament wasn't perfect. Thousands and thousands of animals were killed every year to cover the sin of the people, until the sin could be finally dealt with by a final and total sacrifice. The Old Testament sacrifices needed to be done over and over because they weren't worth very much. But Jesus sacrificed himself... and that sacrifice was worth everything.

Jesus is a better high priest. Jesus is an eternal high priest, a perfect high priest. He offered ONE sacrifice for the sins of the people... and HE was the sacrifice. A perfect sacrifice that only needed to be offered once, and allows us to have a perfectly restored relationship with God.

And Christ is still our high priest. The sacrifice has been made and now Christ is constantly interceding for us each time we sin, each time we confess and are forgiven.

Hebrews 7:25: "He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

Jesus is the fulfillment of all of the promises.

We are in a very similar situation to the Israelites who were in captivity in Babylon, aren't we? We are as unfaithful as the Israelites. We can look back and remember how God provided for us, but we so quickly forget. We don't honor God the way he should be honored.

We care about our own preferences and convenience much more than we care about our neighbors. We worship the God of sports and entertainment with just as much energy as we worship the one, true God. We'll drive here to church on Sunday morning—sing a few songs, recite a few prayers, think a few holy thoughts, write a check—and then drive back to our sin-filled worlds, where YOU are the king. Where very little matters besides how YOUR life is going.

We're in Babylon, just like the Israelites were. We're in a dark cave, eagerly waiting for some good news, some spark of hope to light our way back home. We've been unfaithful and sinful and self-centered, and have abandoned God time and time again. Will God remember his promise to us?

What promise? ALL of the promises!

Psalms 103: He will remove our sin from us as far as the east is from the west. Matthew 11: Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Philippians 4: God “will supply all your needs from his glorious riches.” John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

All of the promises made to us in the Old Testament, and all of the promises made to us in the New Testament, are all fulfilled by Jesus. Even though we’re living in Babylon—this world is not our true home; it’s a dark place filled with sin and evil—even though we’re now living in captivity, our God has accomplished ultimate victory at the cross. He made us a promise, and he kept that promise.

So we wait for him to ARRIVE again. This is the first week of the church year, the first Sunday in Advent. We’re remembering how God’s people waited for Jesus to ARRIVE in Bethlehem, and how his arrival changed everything.

We don’t have to wait for that anymore. Christ HAS come. He was born, he lived, he died, and he rose from the dead... all according to his plan, and all for the sake of his precious children who had been so unfaithful to him.

But we ARE waiting for his *second* arrival this Advent. He is coming again soon, and will take us back with him away from this Babylon, where evil prevails and injustice and suffering are common and our bodies are weak and frail and our loved ones are taken from us and we never seem to get things right. Christ will come again and rescue us once and for all.

He will be our forever king. He will be our forever high priest. Everything will be perfect, and we will finally and forever *rest* in God’s perfect land. We can be sure this will happen because God promised it.

And we have a God who keeps his promises. Amen.