

SERMON – PASTOR GREG

18.12.2022

PROMISES. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Promises- we all make promises. Think of some of the promises that you might have made: As a young child you might have said: “I promise to keep my room tidy”. At your Confirmation you would have agreed to these questions: “Do you renounce the devil and all his works...Do you believe in God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit...Do you intend to listen to the preaching of God’s word and to receive the supper of our Lord...” Many of you are or have been married and at your wedding you promised something like this: “I therefore ask you will you have ...as your wife/husband to live together faithfully in marriage.” Others have made promises to pay back the loans we took out to buy a car or our house. Our lives are full of promises- promises that we have made and promises that have been made to us.

Is there anyone among us who has kept every single promise made by us? Is there anyone here who has never been on the end of a broken promise? I very much doubt it.

But there is One who always keeps His promises and of course that is God. In the season of Advent, we have heard the constant call of the prophets preaching to God’s people to repent and return to God. Dire warnings were issued but they fell on deaf ears and hard hearts. Destruction was coming and when it finally came the people cried out, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” But God had already answered that question: “I did not forsake you- you forsook me.” But even in the midst of all this terrible calamity, God would not change His mind- He wanted and wants all people to be saved and so in the midst of the terrible warnings He made wonderful promises. In particular, there are three promises made by God through Isaiah the prophet:

Isaiah 7: *The LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel.* Immanuel- God with us- Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary is God with us- through his word and through his Spirit. God’s promise has been fulfilled.

Isaiah 9: *(God) will honour Galilee of the Gentiles...the people walking in darkness have seen a great light...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...He will reign on David’s throne for ever and ever.* Jesus grew up in Nazareth- in the region near Galilee. His mother and step father were descendants of King David. He lived, he died, he rose and he ascended to his rightful place- at the right hand of his Father and now he reigns over all of creation. Through him we have peace with God.

Isaiah 11: *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord- and he will delight in the fear of the Lord...The wold will lie with the lamb...they will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.* Jesse was the father of David- the greatest king of Israel but despite his faithfulness he broke many of his promises to God- adultery and murder among them. He was forgiven but this forgiveness came at a price- the death of his first born child with Bathsheba.

Yet despite his many sins he still remained faithful to God but more than that God remained faithful to the promise He had made to David- that his descendants would reign forever and this promise is fulfilled in the ultimate Son of God- Jesus Christ. And you might remember that when Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist in the Jordan the River, the Spirit of God came as a dove and sat upon his shoulder. And through his earthly ministry and his continuing ministry through you and me- the church- he and we continue to receive the Holy Spirit and bear his fruit: Gal 3: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. So once again God has kept His promise but not yet complete here on earth. We still struggle with fear, anger, war, murder, sickness, fire. Flood, drought – the list is almost endless. But there is now already a place where this is no more- heaven. And we and all of creation long for the return of Son of Man to finally bring an end to all the evil we do to each other. This promise is yet to be fulfilled completely and utterly- but one it will be fulfilled because God always keeps His promise.

I began by considering some of the promise that we have made and those which have been made to us. Many have been kept but many have been broken. But we do not give up because this is one of the many wonderful blessings we enjoy here on earth. Upon repentance our broken promises are forgiven. Through God's grace and forgiveness, we can forgive those who have broken their promises to us. In Christ we all live in freedom, love, forgiveness, light, love and life. Eternal life. Next week we celebrate the fulfilment of Isaiah 9: *The virgin will give birth to a Son and will call him Immanuel.* Because of this we can rejoice- always because this Immanuel is God for us and with us- always- to the very end of the age. Amen.