

Title: The Promise – Fulfilled – Life is Given
Date: December 26, 2021
Subject: The Christ of Christmas fulfills God's promises to give us life.
Scripture: John 1:1 - 14

“Promises Made - Promises Kept.” Not a new campaign slogan. It's actually been used that way since at least the late 1960s. A variation goes “promises made - promises delivered” which is used by other politicians, a sports betting agency, athletes (Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks who promised he wouldn't leave until he made the team a championship level one) and a guy who delivers mulch.

The intent is fine, but there's really, truly only one who could say all his promises he's made have been kept and delivered. That is the Almighty Lord God of the universe.

The Old Testament has many promises regarding the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One who was to come. Most biblical scholars place it at around 300 prophecies though some rabbis say there are 600 plus.

Peter Stoner emphasized 8 about the first coming of Christ. He illustrated how difficult it would be for them to be fulfilled in one person. He suggested covering the entire state of Texas 2 foot deep with silver dollars. Mark one silver dollar with a red X. Stir up the whole state. Then you have one opportunity to draw the marked silver dollar. Texas has 268,820 square miles or almost 7 ½ trillion square feet (7,494,271,488,000). At a two-foot depth that becomes 15 trillion cubic feet. The chances of picking that one marked silver dollar is 10 to the 17th power (one with 17 zeros). That's the same chance of eight prophecies being fulfilled in one person. Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled not just those eight but all of the 300 or 600 or more that pertained to his life on earth during his first coming with the rest ready to be fulfilled at his return.

In the birth narrative of Jesus Christ, promises were made. Zechariah and Elizabeth would have a son though they were old (Luke 1:13, 17, 25). Joseph was told the son who'd be born to Mary would be conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was to give him the name Jesus because he would save people from their sins (Matthew 1:20, 21). Mary would give birth to a son who'd be called the Son of the Most High who would be the ruler of a never ending kingdom (Luke 1:31 - 36). The shepherds were told the Savior had been born and he was Christ the Lord. He'd be found wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger (Luke 2:11, 12). Simeon and Anna had been waiting for the promise of God to show up in the person of the Messiah (Luke 2:25 - 32, 34, 35, 38). It had been communicated to the wise men through the star that the new king had been born (Matthew 2:2).

How did these people respond? Zechariah marveled. Mary believed and pondered (Luke 1:45, 2:19). The shepherds accepted and then went to check for themselves - trust and verify (Luke 2:16 - 18). Simeon, Anna and the wise men worshipped (Luke 2:25 - 38, Matthew 2:2). And some waiting was involved.

No matter how long it takes, God fulfills his promises. It's evident in the advent themes: God fulfills his promise of giving hope, peace, joy, love . . . and light as we saw on Christmas Eve. These are all possible because Jesus is the promised life from God.

Read John 1:1 - 4

I. Jesus is life

One of the key words in the book of John is the word “Word.” It isn't because of the frequency of use but what it signifies. It's used three times in v. 1 as a proper name. It sets the tone for the entire book. “Word,” as used by the ancient Greeks, referred to what comes out of our mouths and also the thoughts, reason and reasoning ability in the mind. It was the rational principle governing the entire universe. Jews used “Word” as a way to talk about God. The “Word” communicates across all people groups.

The “Word” is described as divine - he is God. There's also distinction between the Word and God who is the Father. So we have God the Father and God the Word which is the Son of God. Everything God was and is the Word/the Son is. Therefore, the Word is everywhere present, all knowing, all powerful, eternal, immutable, self-existent, self-sufficient, infinite, completely holy, and rules overall.

Those are staggering and mind-blowing attributes. The ones emphasized in these verses are the eternity of the word - with God in the beginning (1:2), creative function (1:3) and possessing life in and of himself (1:4). No one gave life to him. He has his own life principle. It's the essential part of being a being. It includes power, functionality and moral operation. It's the opposite of death and sin.

The Word became flesh. Equally staggering as his attributes are his willingness and decision to temporarily put a hold on exercising his power, position and authority as God. He left the glory and splendor of heaven, trading it for a cattle feed trough. He swapped the robes of deity for strips of cloth in a manger. He changed being surrounded by the symphony of angels singing his praises to having lowly shepherds as his courtesans. From filling the expanse of the heavens to being confined in a womb. From creating the universe to having fingers unable to grasp the straw in his manger. He willingly and humbly laid aside his glory, the glory of the Supreme Being of the universe, to become human.

The Son of God did this to serve us, to experience all we do – temptation, hurt, pain, suffering, indignity, brutality – all without sin so he could be the perfect sacrifice for people who are sinners. He came to be Immanuel – God with us – so we could be with God. Him with us so we could be with him.

Another major concept of the Gospel of John and his letters is life. It's used 36 times in the Gospel and 15 times in his letters. Twice Jesus identifies himself, the I AM, as the life. The first comes when he tells Martha who is grieving the death of her brother Lazarus. Jesus tells her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25, 26).

The second time Jesus was in the process of comforting his disciples. His departure from the earth after sacrificing himself for our moral crimes against God was the next day. You can imagine what it would be like to be with the disciples, the uncertainty of what was going to happen. Jesus had told them he was going to Jerusalem where he'd be beaten, mocked, scourged and killed but also to rise again on the third day. They had many thoughts cruising through their minds at warp speed.

Thomas, one of the disciples, attempting to gain more understanding, asks, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:6). Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

II. Jesus gives life

It wasn't enough for Jesus to possess life in himself and experience life with the Heavenly Father. He came to share that life with people. He came to give life to people.

To underscore this, Jesus likens people to sheep. He uses another two of the I AM statements. First he says, "I am the gate" and that whoever enters through him will be saved (John 10:7, 9).

READ John 10:10, 11, 15, 17, 18,

The second I AM is "I am the Good Shepherd." The position comes with responsibilities and purpose. Jesus says his purpose is so he can give life. It's provided by him laying down his life -- which he says four times (10:11, 15, 17, 18). He had the authority to lay down his life and then take it up again. He was the one in charge of when he would die and also coming back to life. No one had the power or ability to kill him so he needed to surrender the ability so he could be killed.

It's through his death and life that we're able to overcome death and receive life from him. Later in John 10 we find more about his gift.

READ John 10:28 - 30. The Father and the Son are acting in cooperation and they have the same power. No one can take those to whom Jesus gives life out of the hands of the Divine Being.

In another spot, Jesus used another of the I AM statements in which he connected the concepts of light and life that he would bring and give. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

And in still another of the I AM statements Jesus said, "I AM the bread of life" (John 6:33, 35, 48, 51). He proclaimed he is the God given bread who gives life to the world. Whoever eats of him (comes to him and believes in him) will never go hungry or be thirsty and will have everlasting life. The promise from Jesus is: "because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19). Jesus is the life-giver.

With Jesus linking the I AM statements to him giving life, it seems like he's trying to make a point. I hope we get it. Jesus is the one who gives life. It doesn't come from anyone. It only comes from the Son of God.

He is the bridge between God and people. He came to bridge the great divide. We can say this a couple of ways: he is the bridge that crosses the great divide, his cross bridges the divide.

III. The condition to receive is believe in Jesus Christ

We've seen the this already in Jesus conversations with Martha (John 11:25, 26) and the disciples (John 14) as well as when Jesus describes himself as the bread of life (John 6). The purpose of the book of John was to present evidence about who Jesus Christ is: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ,

the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30, 31). Let's go back to our initial Scripture in John 1.

Read John 1:10 - 13.

There are those who don't see Jesus for who he claims to be, for who he truly is. Jesus interacted with some who, even though they were well acquainted with Scripture, didn't see him through all their study. They refused to come to him to have life (John 5:39, 40). The Jewish people by and large rejected Jesus.

Today, there are people from all cultures and ethnicities who refuse the gift of life Jesus offers. They know about him, can recite some of the facts about him, and even quote lengthy passages of Scripture even as an atheist in Israel who'd committed the entire Bible to memory but it didn't lead to them turning to Jesus to receive life. They don't put their trust in the evidence.

The New York City Metropolitan Museum of Art had an elaborate nativity scene from the 18th century with nearly 200 figures. There were shepherds, townspeople and magi gazing in awe at the angels or watching the manger in anticipation. One figure was different. It was a barefoot man carrying a heavy load on his back. He looked at the ground. He's representative of people who are so weighed down with burdens they can't or won't look at Jesus. They reject Jesus. That's the sad part.

The happy part comes in verse 12. There's the need to believe. You've probably figured out by now that believe is another dominant word in the book of John. It's often connected with receiving life. I found at least 11 times (1:12; 3:15, 16, 36; 4:10, 14; 5:24; 6:33, 40, 47; 20: 30 & 31). V. 12 brings together receiving and believing. The condition is people have placed their personal trust in Jesus Christ as the one who could deliver them from their condition of being separated from God.

IV. The result

A. Eternal life. Those who receive Jesus and believe in his name are given the right to become children of God. He gives them life. It means a person knows God (John 17:3).

This is seen in the encounter Jesus has with the religious teacher Nicodemus. The man had heard about Jesus and wanted to meet him to hear for himself what Jesus had to say. Nicodemus was confused about things and when Jesus talked about being born again, being born from above, being born spiritually, he didn't get it immediately. Jesus spoke a lot about believing, including some of the most familiar words from the Bible: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Just prior to that Jesus said, “Everyone who believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:15). Just afterwards Jesus said, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son” (John 3:17, 18). Then Jesus brings in the concept of light and says light has come into the world but men love darkness instead of

light because their deeds are evil and they don't want to come into the light because they enjoy living in their evilness. However, those who live by the truth will come into the light (John 3:19 - 21).

Nicodemus placed his trust in Christ and received eternal life. This isn't revealed until the end of the book of John. He joined in helping to take Jesus body after the crucifixion and prepare it for burial. He allowed himself to be known as a follower of Christ.

B. Abundant life

John 10:10. Life to the full, abundant, overflowing. The life which results through Christ's coming is contrasted with what believers had before. It's more than an upgrade or something a little better. Grace instead of wrath, hatred, cruelty and disfavor. Truth not lies and deception. Nourishment not famine. Not the experience of the wicked whose life here, though it may be filled with stuff valued by the world, is a precursor to eternal punishment, but spiritual life of wholeness that begins now and carries through eternity. Have a shepherd who guides, protects and provides rather than thieves like pleasure, performance, possessions, position, and pursuits or the devil who seek to kill and destroy. Have God-ordained meaning, purpose and significance. Not just existing, hoping, fingers crossed, to get by. But have a reason for living. Not just existing but blessed. Life not death. Have the navigation tools to make it through this life.

I heard someone on the radio say that if the message of Christmas you've heard hasn't brought you joy and made a change in you, then maybe you haven't really heard or understood the message. It's good news of great joy...

Overflows so can share with others. "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them" (John 7:38). Howard Thurman puts it this way (Southern Living, online 7/12/21), "When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with the flocks, then the work of Christmas begins: To find the lost, to heal those broken in spirit, to feed the hungry, to release the oppressed, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among all peoples, to make a little music with the heart. And to radiate the Light of Christ, every day, in every way, in all that we do and in all that we say. Then the work of Christmas begins."

We celebrate at Christmas and throughout the year that Jesus came to earth to give us life. He willingly gave up the splendors of heaven. He did this because of his love for us. Without him we would be separated from God forever. Because of him we have eternal life now and forever.