

Theme: God Has a Plan for Us
Subject: **The Promises of God**
Reading: James chapter 1

Promises, promises

There is a saying in a play by Shakespeare that has been used many times over 400 years by all sorts of people: “my word is my bond”. It’s a phrase that is used to indicate that one will always do what one has promised to do.

This is not a phrase that applies to enough people in this world today. Sadly, so often men and women make promises and are just not able to fulfil them. In many cases this is because of a change in circumstances or something has happened in their life. There is a minority who make pronouncements with no real intention of carrying them out. Many think that politicians are a prime example of a group who make promises and break them.

God’s promises

So, the problem today is that there is an expectation that promises may not be fulfilled. Yet, when we turn to consider God and His promises, we need a totally different mindset. The fact is that God’s promises are 100% reliable. In the history of mankind God has never failed to fulfil His promises. This gives us absolute confidence that the future promises He has made will most assuredly happen.

Here are three examples from the Bible that express God’s clear plan and that we can rely on it.

(The LORD said) “but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD”
(Numbers 14:21)

Those words of God are crystal clear: it is God’s purpose that all the earth will be filled with His glory. We can rely on it by the fact that God lives.

The second example is from the prophet Isaiah, quoting the words of God:

“Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure’” **(Isaiah 46:9-10)**.

Once again, these words that cannot be misconstrued – God says that His counsel shall stand, and He will accomplish all His purpose.

The last of the three is also from the Old Testament:

“Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations” **(Deuteronomy 7:9)**

We can have total and absolute confidence in the promises of God. In that reference from Deuteronomy, we have a picture of a God who is utterly and always faithful, and there is no variableness or inconsistency in Him.

The introductory reading to this talk expresses precisely those words about God.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” **(James 1:17)**

That phrase *with whom is no variation or shadow of turning* is an especially lovely phrase. It is so expressive of a God who is totally dependable, who is unchangeable. Here we see the guarantee of God as a rock, as a provider, as a Father only of that which is good and perfect for those who place their faith and trust in Him. If that is our attitude towards Him, what an amazing comfort this is – a guarantee from our Father who will provide for all our needs.

Precious and very great

In the writings of Peter, one of the closest disciples of Jesus, Peter has a lovely description of God’s promises. In his letters, Peter is writing to believers in Jesus and this is what he writes at the beginning of the second letter:

“May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” **(2 Peter 1:2-4)**

What a description of God's promises! Precious and very great – if we believe in Jesus and have faith in God. In those verses we start to learn something of what God has in store for those who love Him and try to follow His commandments – partakers of the divine nature. Here is the promise of immortality, having that same immortal nature that God has now.

The Crown of Life

In the reading to introduce this talk from the letter of James chapter 1, this principle is also talked about in verse 12.

“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12)

The promise is the ‘crown of life’. It's a promise of life when our nature will be immortal. The letter of James is very practical; he acknowledges that there will be challenges and trials in our lives. At times, life may become very difficult for us. But James emphasises that the promises of God are there to encourage us to keep going, to maintain our trust and faith in God and to follow the example of the life that Jesus lived.

God's promises are so very special; persevering will be well worthwhile. Not only that, God will help us now in the lives we live. We have our Bibles, the Word of Life, to help and to guide us. Also, we can talk to God at anytime in prayer with total confidence that He hears us.

Future Promises

We must ask the question – precisely what has God promised in the Bible for the future?

Here is a brief summary...

- Jesus Christ will return to this earth – **Acts 1:9-11**
- Those who have died and truly believe in Jesus will be raised from the dead, just as Christ was the ‘firstfruits’ – **1 Corinthians 15:22-23**
- Those resurrected – along with those still alive when Jesus returns – who are faithful will, by God's grace, be given a place in a new age – **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**
- The nature of these believers will be changed from being mortal to immortal (as we saw earlier)
- This new age is described as the “Kingdom of God”, a time when there will be peace and righteousness forever. No more death and no more sin – **Revelation 21:1-4**
- Everlasting life is promised to the faithful in this Kingdom.

In **Matthew 6:9**, Jesus taught his disciples to pray to God. As part of the Lord's prayer, we have those words *“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*.

The wonder of these precious promises is only available to us because God gave His son Jesus to be our saviour. Jesus himself spoke these words.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

The guarantee we have that these promises are very real is that Jesus rose from the dead. That event gives us certainty. To add to our confidence, we can also look back at promises that God has made in the past which have already come to pass. There are many in the Bible, but let's look at a couple.

Certainty of God's promises

Back in the book of Genesis, God made a number of promises to Abraham. The promises start in chapter 12, where Abraham was told that God would bless him and make of him a great nation (**Genesis 12:1-3**). From Abraham came the nation of Israel. In chapter 13, Abraham was promised that all the land he could see would be given to him and his descendants forever (**Genesis 13:14-17**). The promises continue in chapters 15, 17 and 22. In the lifetime of Abraham, he didn't see several of these promises fulfilled and therefore he must be one who will be raised from the dead to be given a place in the coming Kingdom of God.)The New Testament confirms this.)

One promise that was fulfilled in his lifetime was that he would have a son with his wife Sarah. This was a miracle because both were well past the age of bearing children. Yet, in the course of time, Isaac was born as promised in **Genesis 17:19**.

One crucial promise from God is recorded twice – the second occasion is in Genesis 22:18:

“In your (Abraham's) offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” (Genesis 22:18)

What is remarkable for us is that Paul specifically refers to this promise in the letter he wrote to the Galatians. In Galatians 3:8 he quotes the precise words. Then, in verse 16 of the same chapter, he adds

“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘and to offsprings’, referring to many, but referring to one, ‘and to your offspring,’ who is Christ.” (Galatians 3:16)

There, without any doubt, is a fulfilled promise of God.

Another link to Jesus is seen in a promise made to King David. In 2 Samuel 7, God – through the prophet Nathan – makes several promises to David. We want to focus on one in verse 16.

“And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:16)

The connection to Jesus comes in the record of the birth of Jesus and what the angel Gabriel said to Mary, the mother of Jesus 2000 years ago. This also links to the future promises of God that we looked at earlier.

The reference is in the first chapter of Luke’s gospel:

“And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’”

(Luke 1:30-33)

Both Abraham and David were promised a special seed and, in both cases, this refers to Jesus Christ. How appropriate that the New Testament opens with these words...

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matthew 1:1)

Conclusion

These are just two brief examples of the many promises from God that we have in our Bibles that have already been fulfilled. These give us confidence that God’s future promises are certain.

Without any question, God’s kingdom will be established on this earth. God wants you and me to be part of His future plans. The question is – do we really desire a place in that glorious time to come?