

“God Is Completely Committed”

Selected Scriptures

Sermon for Advent Midweek December 15, 2021

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

Rev. Charles Westby, Pastor

+++

We come this evening to the last installment in our series regarding the nature of God’s promises. We consider that when a person makes a promise to another, they are communicating their intention to do what they promise. Thus, when God makes a promise to us, He is communicating His intention to do what He says and that He is completely committed to us.

To get us started suppose that Joe promises to build a house for Jerry, and Jerry promises to pay Joe for building it. By the making of these promises, both Joe and Jerry expect that they each genuinely and really intend to do what they promise.

This is vitally important. It creates a relationship of reliance or trust between them so that the house can get built. Jerry trusts Joe’s promise to build the house. So, Jerry goes out and borrows money in reliance on Joe’s promise so he can pay Joe to build it. Likewise, Joe relies on Jerry’s promise to pay him to build the house. So, he begins to obtain materials and set aside the time and then gets to work.

We know these things quite well in human relations. These things hold true even more so in God’s relation to us in Jesus Christ.

I should say, however, that the example of Joe’s and Jerry’s promises to each other in the context of building a house are not quite the same as God’s promises to us. Joe and Jerry are involved in a business transaction that we are quite familiar with. In such transactions, each person involved in the transaction makes a promise to the other. These are called bi-lateral agreements. Joe promises to build the house on the expectation that Jerry promises to pay him. Jerry promises to pay Joe for building a house on the expectation that Joe promises to build it.

God’s promises to us, however, are not bilateral. God’s intention to keep His promises is not conditioned on some performance on our part that we could render back to God. This is good news. For if God’s promises were so conditioned on us in any way, then we could never be sure that God intends to fulfill His promise; and in fact, His promises would never be fulfilled. This is because we do not fulfill any performance on our part that could be a condition of God intending to keep His promises to us.

Furthermore, God is under no obligation to us by nature, or right, or under the law. He is under no obligation to us because God is God, and we are His creatures. We are completely dependent upon God for every good thing we are and have. He is also under no obligation to us because we have not kept His commandments the way we ought. This is to say that we do not fear, love, and trust in God about all things as we ought. We do not love our neighbor as we ought. If there were our side of the bargain, we have not kept it. As a result, the ability to have faith in the sincerity of God’s intentions would turn sour if God’s promises were dependent on our performance toward God.

Praise God that His promises are not bilateral. His intention to keep His promises rests in His own character and commitment to us. God’s promises are more like a parent making a promise to a child where the child makes no promise back to the parent and has no more power to cause the parent to fulfill the promise than I have to hold back the wind. Yet, the parent’s promise generates trust and love in the heart of the child.

So, when God makes a promise to us, God is communicating that He intends to do what He

promises. He communicates that He is completely committed to us. This is amazing grace. Since God is fully committed to us in His promises, where He is otherwise under no obligation to us, His doing so is pure grace.

These things are illustrated in God's relationship with the people of Israel. In chapter 50 of Isaiah, God spoke judgment against Israel: "Where is the certificate of your mother's divorce, whom I have put away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? (Isaiah 50:1 NKJV)" Why has the situation with the certificate of their mother's divorce come about? Why have they been sold to God's creditors? It is because of their sins. Thus, the LORD continues, "For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put way" (Isaiah 50:1 NKJV). Israel had broken its promises to God.

But then God speaks this redeeming promise through Isaiah: "[Y]ou shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is In Her, and your land Married, for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. . . [A]s the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:2-5 ESV).

Here is God's unfailing commitment to His people. He is committed to forgiving their sins and delighting in them. God demonstrated His unfailing commitment completely when Jesus died on the cross in redeeming sacrifice.

And what is even more wonderful is that God's complete commitment to us in His promises is intended to inspire in us confidence and trust in Him, so that we hold Him to His commitment to be good and gracious to us. This is expressed in the words of the Psalm:

Let Your steadfast love come to me, O LORD,  
Your salvation according to Your promise.  
This is my comfort in my affliction,  
that Your promise gives me life.  
I entreat Your favor with all my heart;  
be gracious to me according to Your promise.  
Let Your steadfast love comfort me,  
according to Your promise to Your servant.  
My eyes long for Your promise;  
"When will You comfort me?"  
Uphold me according to Your promise, that I may live,  
and let me not be put to shame in my hope!  
My eyes long for Your salvation,  
and for the fulfillment of Your righteous promise.  
Keep steady my steps according to Your promise,  
and let no iniquity get dominion over me.  
Your promise is well tried [that is, utterly dependable],  
and Your servant loves it.  
Plead my cause and redeem me;  
give me life according to Your promise!  
(Psalm 119: 41, 50, 58, 76, 82, 116, 123, 133, 140, 154 ESV).

Promise means God's commitment to us in grace and the inspiration of our confidence in God.

And so, there was blind Bartimaeus, along the road at Jericho. He heard that Jesus was passing by (Mark 10:46). The promise of God's mercy in the Messiah was living large in his soul. He had heard about Jesus. He is here, the Son of David. So, he cries out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" (Mark 10:47 ESV). They told him to be quiet and stop disturbing the Messiah. What interest could he possibly have in the likes of you?, they say. But he cried out all the more, addressing Jesus by His true and proper title according to God's promise to David: "Son of David, have mercy on me" (Mark 10:48 ESV). Bartimaeus is holding God to His promise to be good to His people: "Have mercy on me." Jesus received him and said go your way, your faith in Me through God's promises has saved you" (Mark 10:50, 52).

So, when God makes a promise, He communicates that He intends to do what He promises. May the Lord's promises in Jesus inspire in us the faith that Bartimaeus had, that we hold God to His promises in Jesus, count on them, and not be deterred in seeking mercy from His hand. For God is completely committed to you. His promises tell us so. Thanks be to God. Amen.