

Because He Said He Would...

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Intro

As we enter the season of Advent this morning, we hear through the words of the prophet Jeremiah that a great change will occur. This change will occur through God's fulfillment of a promise.

Depending on who you read, Jeremiah either was born or began his ministry in 627 BC and was critical of Judah and its leaders as they, time and time again, turned away from God to follow the false gods of their neighbors. He proclaimed that an unhappy future was on their horizon, but that eventually, there would be a change, a fulfillment of a promise, that would allow a new and more enduring relationship with God to develop; there would be a change that would bring life. In this passage we hear God speaking through Jeremiah about how a leader will arise who will bring justice and safety to the land.

As Christians, we are able to read the birth of Jesus into this statement: and why not? For it is through his fulfillment of a promise, through his leadership that righteousness did prevail and ultimately safety was given to all people through his blood.

A great change was instituted through the promise of God being kept. What I would like you to think about is this, especially in light of how it took 600 years for this promise to be kept: how long are you willing to wait for someone to keep their word? The scripture reads this way.

Jeremiah 33:14-16

14 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In 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. ¹⁶In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

Psalm 25:1-10

Intro

Our second passage seems like a very nice, 'read it in church on a Sunday morning', sort of passage. Except that it really doesn't appear to have any ties to the set up that we just had from Jeremiah.

Except for one word.

As I was reading verse 8, it jumped out at me and while I wasn't sure what to do with it initially, it felt important.

Then it struck me: this willingness to trust in a promise to be fulfilled by God even when there appears to be no earthly way of it being able to be fulfilled,...is not something that comes naturally.

In fact, I would say that the exact opposite is true: that after a period of time (which is different for all of us), if there isn't proof in the pudding, we don't believe that the pudding is worth holding on to. That is

not an intentionally faithful way of following God: it is the path taken by sinners, which was the word that stood out.

What we are about to hear, is that even though we are sinners, He will continue to instruct us in 'the way'. God keeps imploring us to follow...even though we may give every indication that we never will. Hear that again: God keeps imploring us to follow, to trust, to believe in His promises...even when it feels like we have given up. Kind of sounds like hope, doesn't it? The scripture reads this way.

Psalm 25:1-10

¹ To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. ² O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. ³ Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴ Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. ⁵ Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

⁶ Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. ⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

⁸ Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. ⁹ He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. ¹⁰ All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

'Because He Said He Would...'

Follow through is a trait that, so very often, feels to be in short supply. The examples and stories of people who are unwilling or unable to keep their word are, well, they're in abundant supply.

So much so that when I started looking for illustrative examples of people who kept their promises, I ended up struggling to find much beyond biblical examples (which were, by the way, in abundant supply).

Then I stumbled on to a blog from five years ago that talked about a video that was posted online under the tagline, 'because I said I would...'. The video showed the blurred out face of an individual whose voice was clearly being altered. The person talked about how he went out drinking with his friends, to the point that he blacked out. He talked about how he drank to get out of his own head because of the depression he was experiencing.

Regardless, it was in that blacked out state that he got into his truck and ended up driving down the road the wrong way where he struck an oncoming vehicle, killing the other driver. He talked about how his lawyers told him that if he was willing to lie, if he was willing to alter his story, they would be able to free him, or at the very least, reduce the sentence from the charges he would face if or when he was arrested.

At the 1 minute and 40 second mark of the video, the face and voice clears and Matthew Cordle confesses to what he had done.

The reason he made the confession? Because he wanted to do everything he could to make sure that no one else would have to face the pain that he had inflicted upon the victim's family. He took a stand. He made a promise.

And then he followed through on it. He was ultimately convicted and sentenced to 6 ½ years in prison. His video, his story became the viral story that propelled forward the 'because I said I would...' movement that has been able to reach out and speak to close to half a million people encouraging people to keep their word, to follow through.

https://youtu.be/MmpK_EshSL4

The story of following through is absolutely what we are able to hear this morning in this short passage from Jeremiah.

Some back story: when these words were uttered, they were passed down via oral tradition until they were written down many years later. The Israelites took the promise of 'a righteous Branch' to mean a king both out of the line and the likeness of David. To them, this passage meant a return to the monarchy that had brought much glory to the united kingdom of Israel. Their expectations were certainly understandable because the promise that God is alluding to through Jeremiah that can be found in II Samuel 7:16. It is there that God says through Nathan to King David, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."

With that sort of a promise, it makes perfectly good sense to believe that God will fulfill it through a ruler claiming the throne.

So imagine that this was what you were expecting.

It is a promise of God, it will come, you trust that.

And yet, generation after generation there is nothing. Israel continues to be an area that is controlled by everyone but the Jews. Almost six centuries roll by, 600 years, and the only thing that can be counted on regarding these words from Jeremiah is that they are going to stick out like a sore thumb.

It is for this reason that many priests looked at these verses with their Messianic prophesy and said, essentially, "promises, promises. It's never going to happen."

Then Jesus begins his ministry and the entire concept of royalty gets flipped on its head. The king of kings is now a healer, a teacher, a guide, a friend. The prince of peace is one who would be born so that he might die.

If you had been waiting all that time, would you want to believe that this was the fulfillment of the promise? The ruler that Jeremiah prophesied?

Many did not.

And yet there were some who, maybe even in their doubt, held on to the seed of hope that maybe it would happen.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I stand before you today on this first Sunday in Advent to act as a reminder that the seed of hope that was held on to so long ago has sprung forth! We would not be here if the beginning of the fulfillment of the divine promise about a righteous branch from the stump of David had not taken place. The promise was kept, that the leader has come and delivered the

righteousness that was so longed for. It took a long time, but God followed through with the promises that had been made.

There is an interesting little thing, however. We have the ability to stand back today and say that yes, the promise that was made to the people of Judah almost 2600 years ago came to fruition only 2000 years ago in the person of Jesus Christ.

And yet, when times get tough in our own lives and the only luck that we seek to have is the bad kind, how quickly do we begin to doubt God's care for us? How quickly do we begin to say, "where's the follow through?" I would have to say that for many of us, maybe even most of us, the answer is too quickly. We look around at the world and see all the ways that promises are broken...and we begin to lose hope.

And that is where the reading from Psalm comes in.

Look, I am right there with you when it comes to looking out at the world and wondering if maybe we misunderstood something in these stories throughout scripture...because it feels like we're getting further and further away from God's kingdom and not closer.

And that is why we need to sort through all the illustrations that point us toward the belief that there is no way that God could be real (because look at how messed up the world is), and find those moments when people are willing to follow through to act as a touchstone that the promise that is found in Jesus is a hope that will continue to abide...through every season of life.

Again, it can be very easy to sit back and see the truth that is Jesus being the answer to the promise of God through Jeremiah. Sometimes, it's not so easy to trust that in our own lives. All we have to do is think of all the examples of broken promises that we have encountered, and doubts begin to creep in, even in relation to the promises of God.

What I invite us to do during this particular season of Advent is to allow yourself to trust, with just a little bit more of your heart, mind, soul, and strength that the promises of God to love and care, support and uphold are for you. I'm not looking for all of it: just a little bit more of it. Whatever the circumstance you may face, God is there with You to help You through. Allow Yourself to believe that, to trust in that, just a little bit more. Allow Yourself to see that promise that was made so long to bring justice, righteousness, and safety is still being fulfilled today, in each of our lives.

Why? Because God said He would.

After Sermon Prayer

God, we do celebrate the ways that You have been able to fulfill Your promises. This morning we have seen that the words of Jeremiah came to fruition in the birth of the Christ child, who we are able to prepare for in this annual season of Advent. We pray this morning that we might be as trusting of those promises in our own lives. Help us to put away all of those things that tend to cause our faith to be shaken; help us to trust that no matter the circumstances, You are here with us, holding true to the promises that have been made so many years ago. God we do thank You for Your ability to always stand by Your people and Your word. Amen.