

**A PROMISE****Isaiah 11:1--9, 35:3-10; Matthew 1**

**INTRO:** One time, when she was two or three (or was it four or five?) I promised Sheila that if she would allow the nurse to swab her throat for a throat culture, we would stop at Kreider's Dairy for ice-cream on the way home. She didn't. It was a fight to the near death . . . of the nurse. I'll never forget Sheila, backed into the corner fighting for her life. I could have crawled into a hole. On the way home we drove right past Kreider's Dairy. Sheila noticed and reminded me what I had promised. I reminded her of the condition of said promise and she was furious with me and told me she was moving out and would live with Sammy – our dog – in her dog house. Parents need to stick to their guns.

**YOU PROMISED!** If you're a parent you've likely heard that numerous times – and sometimes it was even when you had actually promised something.

You promised to take the kids to Disney World if they behaved when their grandparents were here for Thanksgiving. But a severe case of amnesia afflicted you when you realized that the cost of such a promise would require you to sell not just one kidney, but both of them. **BUT YOU PROMISED!** And the kids were angelic beings on Thursday and almost fit to announce good news of great joy to shepherds watching their flocks by night. And they *didn't* get amnesia – not like they do when you have to remind them a hundred times to remove their bike from the driveway. You promised. They delivered. You need to deliver too.

You see, too often kids are victims of broken promises. Even little promises when they are broken are painful, but when they are big, and significant promises, like simply being there for them, or being at the ball game they were playing in, you better be there. Let's keep our promises.

God keeps his. We heard the promise of someone who would come and bring genuine and lasting peace – that one came and we celebrate him this Advent season. We saw the promise in the genealogy from Matthew 1. You remember Abraham, whom we just recently spent a few Sundays studying, had no children, yet God promised him as many descendants as the stars. Then we see 14 generations descending from him to David, and then 14 from David to the exile, and then 14 more from the exile to Jesus, the promised Messiah. All from a man whose wife was barren. God keeps his promises. He NEVER breaks his promises, EVER!

Today let's look at the particular promise of the Messiah. First, there is the promise of . . .

**A coming Messiah**

- It's all through the texts we already heard, and they are here in this text. Listen, (Read Isaiah 35:3-10)
- Right away we see a promise: . . . say to those with fearful hearts, "*Be strong, do not fear; your God will come*, Isaiah 35:4a. Your God WILL come!
- And he did! But I get ahead of myself.
- Even if he came in a manger, he still came with strength and the promise of power, strengthen the weak, to calm the fearful, to open the eyes of the blind.
- Look at the other promises here:
  - Righteous judgment
  - Justice for the poor
  - Peace
  - We will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.
- One commentator says that he will come and when he does he will "fetch" his people. We are his people ABC. He will take us home.
- Until then, he promises to make the desert flow with refreshing water and bloom like the Garden of Eden. There will be singing, and joy, so much so that sorrow and sighing will flee. This is the promise. He would come, he DID come, AND, here's the really cool thing ABC, HE'S COMING AGAIN!
- With . . .

**The promise of the Spirit**

- This is prominent in the Isaiah 11 passage, where we have *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 on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and*

*he will delight in the fear of the Lord.* Isaiah 11:1-3a. That about covers it, and it's good to be covered. And notice the promise . . .

- Indeed Jesus, the Messiah, full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1) went into the Wilderness and was tempted by Satan and he prevailed. Then he came back to his home town synagogue and read Isaiah 61 to his listeners and showed Isaiah to be true: "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" Luke 4:18-19.
- And when he left this earth, he promised the Holy Spirit for us. And the promise was fulfilled – the Holy Spirit descended and we, the Church have been empowered ever since. You see, he keeps his promises. . .

### **Through all the generations**

- As Todd was reading Matthew 1 and all those names of over 40 generations you were probably wondering – what's in a bunch of names? How is this even scripture? Where is the promise in this? Well let me answer that – the promise is all through it.
- First of all verse 1 begins with, *This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah.* Matthew pulls no punches with the Jewish audience he was writing to – this is the family line of God's anointed one. That's what Messiah means – anointed one. The one God sent. The one God through whom humanity will be delivered. This is the very one referred to in the other passages I've used today. This is God Son. And here is his earthly, family line.
- As I pointed out earlier, Abraham was an old man with no children and he was promised, very clearly and strongly, that he would be the father of many nations. You will find that promise in the opening verses of Genesis 12. In Matthew 1 Abraham is the first name of the first list of 14 names. Let me point out some other powerful reminders of the promise we see in this list of names:
  - Here in these names we have the continuity of God's purposes through history. Some of these names are almost obscure, but many of them are very familiar. God's plan was passing down through all of them.
  - In Genesis 5 you'll see another genealogy. There it is described with *This is the written account of Adam's family line.* Genesis 5:1. In Matthew 1 we have a new genealogy that brings us the new Adam, Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we have a new and permanent Genesis. With Adam came sin. With the new Adam, came deliverance from sin.
  - There three groups of 14 in this genealogy which would have been significant to Matthew readers because, considering that the number 7 signified perfection, the number 14 is doubly so and signified plenitude and completeness. In other words, this genealogy ends with the icing on the cake – the Messiah.
  - Let me point out that there are 4 women mentioned in this genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. With the exception of Ruth, this is not a list of virtuous women. To be fair to Tamar, who impersonated a prostitute to entrap her less than scrupulous father in law, in many ways she was a victim as much as a sinner. Rahab was a Canaanite woman and worse, a prostitute in the city of Jericho Still she protected the Israelite spies who were reconnoitering the city for Joshua and for that she was saved from destruction. Ruth may have been a virtuous woman, but she was also from Moab and not an Israelite, which was a strike against her. The final woman's name is Bathsheba who was the woman with whom David had an adulterous relationship and even murdered her husband to cover us his crime. All imperfect in some way and yet in the line of Jesus.
  - The truth is this list of names is full of imperfect. After all, they were all fallen men and women. F. B. Meyer perceptively points out, "*In this list of patriarchs, Gentiles, women of doubtful character, good men and bad men, the wise, the illustrious, and the unknown – all supply important links. It is as though to teach us that in the Son of Man there is a blending of all classes, that he might be the representative and helper of all.*" He is the Savior or all humanity: criminals, prostitutes, adulterers, baby killers, murderers, Gentiles, Jews. That is why his name is Jesus, a name which means salvation. Jesus came to save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21b).

- That's what's in a list of names – especially when it's the names that ended up with the Son of God. They add up to a promise.

**Conclusion:** And that is the promise we celebrate today and this Advent – actually it's the hope we have as Christ Followers. God promised a deliverer. He sent a deliverer. The deliverer delivered and he's coming again. That's not just a promise, it's THE PROMISE, and you can count on it. Amen.