

The Promise Fulfilled: A Christmas Eve Reflection

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[0 : 00] Well, Happy Christmas Eve, everyone. Thank you for being so responsive to that. Happy Christmas. Is that what we say here? Happy Christmas?

All right. How about a Merry Christmas? Is that better? All right. You've got to learn how to speak your tongue. Anyway, thank you for being here. It's a great time where we can come together. One of the things that I've been just thinking about these last couple of weeks, actually, in our regular sermon series, is that God is indeed a God of promise, that much of his character rests on whether or not he answers his promises.

Now, I've got a question for you, and I expect you to be honest here. Have any of you ever been disappointed with a gift? No, never. Well, it's kind of funny. I have, so I'll be the only honest one here tonight.

I still remember, and I'm going to tell you about this gift. I was around 12, 13 years old. I was pretty excited about my birthday in March, as any 12 or 13-year-old would be, and my parents decided to get me a globe.

You know, one of those globes, multicolored with all the countries on the world. You know, it kind of spun. You know, most of my friends got hockey sticks or baseball gloves, but I got a globe.

[1 : 29] You know, a lot of your friends, when you're that age, you get something really cool for your birthday. They want to show it off, right? None of my friends knew about that globe.

I did not take it out to the baseball field or to the hockey rink to show off to anybody. But I did know where countries were. I did know where Senegal was.

I did know where Madagascar was. And it was one of those globes, if you spun it, you could feel the undulations between the oceans and the mountains. But I'll be honest with you, I was disappointed with that globe.

It was something that I was willing to accept. And what had happened was my other gift was coming later on. And it just wasn't the time because it was winter.

But for those several days or months, sorry, I felt ripped off that I had not really a great gift, if it couldn't assure you much more.

[2 : 32] And I did talk to my mom. And she knows I'm telling the story. And she knows it took me years of therapy to get over it. But the other gift was a motorcycle. So it more than made up for it.

But for those three months, I was crushed. And it kind of got me to thinking about this very interesting conversations that happens in the Gospel of Luke.

There's this story in Luke 24 where there's these disciples are traveling along the road to Emmaus. And some of you might be familiar with this story. It's after Jesus had died.

And many of them weren't quite sure that he had resurrected yet. So as they are making their way, there had been a bit of a rumor, Mill, that the tomb was empty.

But as they were going down, Jesus joins them on this journey. And Scripture tells us that their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And Jesus just essentially says to them, Hey, what's going on here, guys?

[3 : 34] What's the news? And the disciples were perplexed. And they basically said, What's wrong with you? Have you not heard? As one says, he goes, Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know these things that have happened here in these days?

And he said to them, What things? And they said to him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.

And how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. And I want you to pay attention to this one statement. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.

And it made me think, Imagine if they would have just been happy with that. Would they have been happy with a king that would have just simply overthrown Rome and then have been happy? That's kind of like me, I guess, if I would have settled for the globe when there was something much more later. Their expectation should have been that he was more than the one to redeem Israel. [4 : 52] Jesus responded, he says, Oh foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?

And then he tells them, he says, And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures concerning himself.

The reality is Jesus just doesn't appear on Christmas. Jesus had long been promised before that day in which we celebrate Christmas.

If you've been here for a study of Romans, Paul simply begins Romans 1, 2, and he says, I am but a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel.

And he says, Which God promised beforehand through his promise, through his prophets, in the holy scriptures. Which God promised.

[6 : 03] In fact, God's very character depends on this word promise. Let's be honest. Let's be honest with us today. Some of you are parents.

You make a promise to your child. Guess what? You better keep it, right? Because it's something that they're not going to forget. In fact, what would we think of God if he made promises, yet did not fulfill those promises?

You see, the disciples had every right to have expectations, because, like I said, God, through the prophets, told them there was promises.

And to appreciate the weight of these promises, we must journey back into the many prophecies that were embedded in the Old Testament. In case you did not know, theologians believe there is over 390 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the time of Christmas.

100 of those make direct references to that day of Christmas. Not prophecies that were weeks or months before, but hundreds and hundreds of years.

[7 : 21] From the book of Genesis, which is the first book of our Old Testament, to Malachi, which is the last book of the Old Testament, all of God's messengers spoke of a coming Messiah, a Redeemer who would shatter the chains of sin and darkness.

Consider the words of his prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 9, 6. He says, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Centuries before the Bethlehem star would illuminate the night, the promise was set in motion. In Isaiah 7, 14, the prophet foretells the miraculous birth of a virgin son.

Can you grasp the gravity of this promise? That the creator of the cosmos, the universe, would stoop so low that he would come to dwell with us.

And not only us today, we're talking about us 2,000 years ago, where there truly was no motels or hotels or inns.

[8 : 50] They were just but rooms that you would hope to rent from someone who had extra space that night, and more often than not, it was a family member. You see, Christmas is the revealing of God's divine assurance to us.

It is a promise of God's tangible presence in the midst of our brokenness. Now let's fast forward to that silent night in Bethlehem upon which we celebrate this night.

In a humble stable amidst the straw and the lowly animals, this promise that God made hundreds of years ago unfolded. Luke 2, 10 tells us that the angel had to appear and said, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.

Not simply the Jews, not for a nation of Israel, but for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

In that statement, in that moment, the promise that was made to Abraham, it was a promise that was made to David. It was a promise that was made to God's people that was answered on that Christmas morning.

[10 : 18] And it's interesting, it was answered in the ultimate fulfillment that God came wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger, was actually a living testament to the unwavering faithfulness of the great promise keeper, the great God of the universe.

When Paul tells us in Romans 1-2 that he promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures, we know that Christmas was not an accident.

It just didn't happen. It wasn't some haphazard event. It was actually through meticulous planning do we see the meticulous unveiling of God's redemptive plan.

Romans 1-2 beckons us to recognize the divine orchestration of all the ages. Every prophecy, every word spoken by the prophets, as one author says, was like a note in the symphony leading to the grand crescendo of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah.

As we reflect on this Christmas Eve, let's not see it merely as the end of the calendar year, but as a pinnacle of God's ultimate promise to us.

[11 : 44] A promise that God made to rescue his people. Some people count the birth of Christ not just as a historical fact, but in fact, it's a spiritual truth that echoes through the corridors of eternity.

What's interesting about God's promise, it was not confined to the stables of Bethlehem. This promise transcends time, it transcends cultures, it transcends nations, and it transcends every tongue known to man.

That promise is just as real then as it is today. It is the promise of salvation. It is the promise of redemption. It is the promise of eternal life.

But more importantly, it's a promise that we can have a right relationship with God, the creator of this universe, where we can come in front of him and be unashamed.

The promise, even during our busy modern lives, invites us to pause, invites us to reflect, and invites us to embrace.

[13 : 04] the profound truth that God has fulfilled his word in Jesus Christ. The promise still stands.

A savior has come. And his name is Jesus. The reality is, God doesn't call us to a nostalgic celebration of the past, but he calls us now to live in light of that promise.

Christmas is an invitation for us to embrace the savior, to surrender to the grace that descended from heaven and dwelt among us.

This Christmas, as we exchange gifts, we share meals, and we gather with loved ones, as many of you here attest to as you're visiting family, the reality is we cannot lose sight of the greatest gift, the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The reality is we are called to live in a way that reflects the reality of this promise, that we believe that promise is real. And the way I live my life determines whether I regard that as true.

[14 : 23] let's extend the love and grace we've received to those around us, becoming bearers of the promise to this great world in need.

In conclusion, my friends, Christmas is the celebration of a promise kept, a covenant fulfilled. This evening, as we stand on the eve of Christmas Day, my prayer is that the promises of God resonates in your hearts.

The promise of God spoken through the prophets, realized in the birth of Christ and applicable to our lives today, is the true anchor of our hope.

This Christmas Eve, let the promise of God inspire awe and gratitude in our hearts. Let it propel us into a new year with a renewed sense of purpose and mission.

Please do not let this promise be a historical footnote. Realize that it is a living, breathing reality that transforms lives.

[15 : 36] It is a message that has transformed my life. May the joy of the promise fulfilled be the melody that guides our hearts and may the peace of Christ, the Prince of Peace, reign in your homes and hearts this Christmas and always.

Amen. Let me pray. Dear Holy Heavenly Father, we thank you for that you are indeed a God who answers promises. Father, it is so easy to overlook the true meaning of Christmas and it seems so blasé to say that because everybody is saying that to not think of ourselves but think of others. It is not about giving gifts but it is more than just those things. It is a testimony to say that we believe in that promise. We believe that promise was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago. We believe in that promise so much that we have faith. We believe we have a renewed life and we have a new purpose. A new purpose is to help others understand this great truth that there is indeed hope for the blind, hope for the poor, hope for those that are jailed, hope for those that are imprisoned by their own actions.

Father, I pray that we would not be like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus and be so small-minded about Jesus like I was so small-minded about my gift.

[17:15] The fact of the matter is you know us, you created us, we are born and made in your image. You do indeed have a purpose for us and that purpose is to glorify your name.

I pray if there is anyone here who does not know your great love, I pray that they would indeed ask for faith, a living faith that would give them an understanding of the words that we've spoken here this night.

Lord, may you bless our Christmas. Amen.