

A PROMISE KEPT
“Promised Perfection”
December 22, 2024

INTRO.: It is a joy and privilege to welcome all of you this morning, including those watching online or listening by radio. I begin by wishing you and your family a truly blessed Christmas. I want to thank Pastor John, Pastor Paul, and Pastor Luke for their excellent job preaching the first three Sundays of our Advent series, *A Promise Kept*. I thoroughly enjoyed their messages as they spoke about the Promised Deliverer, Promised Child, and Promised Covenant. Has anyone here ever failed to keep a promise they have made? In this series we have highlighted how God always keeps His promises. This morning, we want to look at the truth expressed through the phrase *Promised Perfection*. To do this we're going to look at three things: The Purpose, The Position, and the Perfection. My prayer is that this will give us cause to celebrate Christmas even more. I hope that you and I would respond in worship and those who have never had a personal relationship with God will come to place their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Let's begin by reading 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

THE PURPOSE

Why is there so much talk about this baby born in a manger? What's the big deal? Think about it. They couldn't even find a room for Mary to have this child. They ended up in a stable, the baby placed in a feeding trough after being born. How could this birth and this child have any significance? As we study these passages in the Bible may God speak to us as to how this was all part of the greatest rescue mission in the history of mankind..

Right before this passage begins the Apostle Paul is compelled, by the love of Christ, to share the message that Jesus Christ died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:15). He is pointing out that when someone comes to faith in Christ that changes everything.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

This is why he begins verse 17 with, *“therefore,”* that is, because of what I have previously said.

“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation:” this person experiences the transforming power of God. Jesus Christ does not come into a person's life to cause a few minor changes but to completely change their life.

“the old has gone:” the way a person lived prior to Christ is not the way they live now!

“behold, the new has come:” the NIV leaves out the word, “behold,” which is in the form of a command. This word is used in the Bible to mark an unusual moment or deed. God doesn't just put the old in the past, He makes all followers of Christ new. This doesn't mean we're perfect but that God is continuing to transform us into a new person.

You may ask, “How is this possible?” Well, I'm glad you asked! Verse 18 provides the answer to that question.

2 Corinthians 5:18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

Through Christ, God has reconciled us to Himself. What does this term, “reconcile,” tell us? It communicates that there is something blocking mankind's relationship with God. It is something that mankind has caused. What is it? **SIN!!!** The Bible clearly tells us that there is nothing we can do to remedy this to fix this relationship. We can't fix it by trying harder, doing any kind of religious exercises, or by trying to buy God's forgiveness.

Many may remember or may have learned about the Berlin Wall which separated East Germany from West Germany. It began in August of 1961 as a wire barrier and would eventually develop into a fortified concrete structure encircling

West Berlin and isolating it from the surrounding East German territory. The wall was 96 miles long and 13 feet tall. In its 28-year history more than 100 people died attempting to cross the wall and hundreds more were killed trying to cross other fortified border points. On June 12, 1987, at the Brandenburg Gate, United States president Ronald Reagan delivered a speech commonly known by a key line from the middle part: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" This wall divided friends and family members and I can still see the sight as I was watching on TV the wall come down. The wall of our sin which blocked our relationship with God, could not be torn down by us.

The purpose of the incarnation is that God became a man, with the mission to die and raise again for your sin and my sin. This isn't a cute story about a baby. It's about Jesus Christ, becoming fully man and yet still fully God, to provide the only way for man to be reconciled to God, to have sins forgiven, and to have the promise of being with God forever in heaven.

The cradle without the cross and empty tomb is powerless, it changes nothing. Where are we without God's reconciliation through Christ?

Ephesians 2:1–4 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, **2** in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. **3** All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. **4** But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,

Romans 5:6–9 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. **7** Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. **8** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. **9** Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

As was shared in previous messages, Jesus had to come as a man to fulfill Scripture. Only a perfect man could die for our sins, and so this meant the man also had to be God because since Adam all are born sinners. We are sinners by our nature and by our actions.

"The shift to the reconciliation metaphor takes what God has done through Christ a step further. The judge enters into a personal relationship with the accused. This is necessary because the judge is the one who has been sinned against and is the focus of the personal hostility. God does not simply make a bookkeeping alteration by dropping the charges against us. God gives himself to us in friendship. Because of our extreme hostility toward God, this investment is accomplished at unspeakable cost." (David Garland)

Have you ever admitted your sin to God, repented of your sin and sought God's forgiveness on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection? It's your only hope! That's the purpose of the cradle!

THE POSITION

In what ways does knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord change my life? Not only are we a new creation but there is something even more exciting which we read about in verse 21.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

"God made Him who had no sin:" this is literally, "knew no sin." Christ did not know sin experientially; He was never involved in sin. There are several places in the Bible that clearly communicate that Jesus was without sin.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

1 Peter 1:18–19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

1 Peter 2:22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin *to be sin for us*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus Christ, a perfect man, took your sin and my sin. To further explain how terrible this was, God the Father could not even look on Jesus Christ, His Son while this was happening. It was why Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (Which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) Mark 15:34 God the Father, with whom Jesus had unending fellowship with from eternity past, had to turn His back on His Son. AS Jesus took our sin darkness came over the land.

This is the fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah had to say about the coming Messiah.

Isaiah 53:3–6 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. **4** Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. **5** But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. **6** We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

What difference does all this make?

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, *so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*.

Our position through Christ is that we become the righteousness of God. God cannot look on sin and, in this verse, we have this great transaction. This is something to truly celebrate! This does not mean we are perfect, but it does mean all those who have come to faith in Christ are a new creation and have been declared righteous by God. As God the Father looks on the believer He sees the righteousness of Christ.

The purpose (to die and raise again for our sin); the position (through Christ we have the very righteousness of God), and finally:

THE PERFECTION

All believers are now between the “now” and the “not yet.” What we are about to read is why, when a believer passes from this life, we can have a “Celebration of Life” service. Let’s take a few minutes and read this passage together.

1 John 3:1-3 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure

The first verse in this section actually begins with the command, “Look! See!” One of the commentators states that this is something that’s meant to take your breath away.

“*How great;*” this meant originally, “of what country.” “It is as if the Father’s love is so unearthly, so foreign to this world, that John wonders from what country it may come.” (John Stott)

The disciples use this word in Matthew 8:27, when, amazed by the power of Jesus in stilling the storm on Galilee, they exclaim, ‘What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him.’ He is in a different category from anything we have come across before. And so is the Father’s love for us. (David Jackman)

“*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us:*” God’s love has been given to us. The tense of this verb tells us that this love will continue to be given to His children. The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 5:5 that God’s love has been *poured out* into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. This is in the same verb tense, telling us that God will continue to pour out His love.

“*that we should be called the children of God:*” this verb (“called”) is in the passive which means God does the calling: He calls us His children. It is because of God working in people’s lives that they come to know the Lord and be called

His child. Some believe that all people are God's children. That is not true according to the Bible. All are created by God but only those who know Christ as Savior and Lord are God's children.

"and that is what we are:" this is in the present tense meaning that once we become a child of God we will always be a child of God.

As we were in Honduras and God was doing amazing things in and through the team of adults and young people, I could picture God saying, "Look, that's one of my kids!" One time when I was coaching cross country in the Poconos and we were on the way to a cross-country meet, I was talking to the bus driver. He was sharing, in a negative light, about what young people are doing. He said something like, "Can you believe what young people are doing today?" I turned the conversation around as I said, "I know. Young people are doing some really amazing things," and I began to share some of those things.

As tremendous as it is to be called one of God's children, what follows should bring us right out of our seats and cause us to shout praises to God. Let's read this together again.

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Someday we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. We will be able to look on God because we will have no sin. When we go to be with the Lord the presence of sin will be gone, and we will be in His presence!

Read the end of the book. John speaks of the new heaven and the new earth.

Revelation 21:3-4 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. **4** He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

SO WHAT???

What difference does this make? What is the point for me?

*Have I come to know this Jesus as my Savior and Lord? This is the one born to die and raise again for my sin. This is the only way to be reconciled to God, to have sins forgiven, and to be saved from the rightful judgment and wrath of God. Maybe this is the first Christmas that you come to understand the Christmas carols you have sung for years. That was how it was for me the Christmas of 1976 as a 19 year old young person.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

*If I have come to know Christ as Savior and Lord is my life a reflection of this relationship with Christ, of His undeserved forgiveness, of my assurance of being with Him for eternity?

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Nobody is saved to be the same! Am I living with eternity in mind? For all those who know Christ as Savior and Lord this is the promise: you will be like Him with no more sin. This sure hope changes our lives.

1 John 3:3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure

The least I can do is live all out for Jesus. Coming to know Christ means giving up ownership of my life and giving everything to Him.

*With whom am I sharing this life-changing message?

For me, one of the highlights of the mission trip to Honduras occurred on the flight home. We pray for God's divine appointments, not just while we are on the mission field, but in our travels to and from. On the way home some of the young people were sitting near a college student returning from a semester abroad. They began talking and it was so

exciting to see and hear them sharing their faith. They shared the Wordless bracelet and listened well, showing genuine concern for him. We will continue to pray for him, and won't you join us?

2 Corinthians 5:20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

So, what do you see when you see the cradle? I close with a poem written by Todd Eckard.

One is come by starlight sky
though thorns take root to crown His brow
One is come as infant meek
yet sword and nails are sharpened down
One is come in coal-dark night
a Light so brilliant, blind will see
One is come in cradle low
a shadow for a blood-stained tree
One is come from throne on high
for mocking, beating, scourging, fierce
One is come as tender child
His hands and side and feet to pierce
One is come to save the dead,
they're cursed souls without His grace
One is come to crush his head
and drink the cup in each one's place
Yea, One is come for you and I
the angels shout o're all the earth
One is come, Immanuel, King
a spotless lamb, a perfect birth