

Life in this world is riddled with broken promises along with all too many broken dreams and hearts that are all too often the result. There's the husband who promises undying love and fidelity to his wife on their wedding day, only to run off later with another woman. There's the salesman who makes all sorts of promises before the sale, yet changes his tune after the contract is signed. There's the father who continually promises his children that he'll spend time with them only to disappoint them again and again because he really isn't willing to make the time.

Sometimes people are forced to break their promises because of situations and circumstances that are out of their control. Sometimes people break their promises because keeping their promise is no longer advantageous to their personal comfort or happiness. Sometimes people never intend to keep their promises. They simply fabricate lies to get what they want.

Whatever the reasons may be for breaking a promise, one thing we know for sure. There is nothing foolproof about any man-made promise. People are sinful. People are fallible. We have no guarantee that any promise people make will be kept. In a world that often requires us to live by people's word and promises that's a pretty frightening thought.

Yet, when we stepped into this church today, in a sense you could say we stepped out of the world into God's presence. Things are very different with God and happily so. God is not a man. He does not lie. He cannot lie. When God speaks, yes he shares some incredible promises. But what's even more awesome and comforting is the message Jeremiah shares with us today, the powerful reminder that with God no promise is too good to be true.

Let's talk a little about Jeremiah. If you turn back a chapter, you'll find Jeremiah sitting in jail. He's under palace guard. As a faithful prophet, he had passed along a message from God to the King, Zedekiah—a message the king didn't like. (One of the occupational hazards of being a spokesman for God.) We must admit, the message was pretty negative: Zedekiah, you're a loser. The war your waging against King Nebuchadnezzar is futile. You will not escape. You will be captured and hauled off to Babylon. Such a prophetic message went over like a lead balloon, no wonder Jeremiah was in jail. In contemporary times, it might be compared with something like a North American Christian leader prophesying that China is going to invade us and this time it's pointless to resist them, for they are God's instrument of wrath upon us. Such a leader might also very well be thrown into jail and most North Americans would likely reject and condemn his message.

Now here's the amazing part of the story. Remember, God had said that Jerusalem would fall and that the people of Jerusalem were about to be carried off to a foreign country. Then, one of Jeremiah's cousins came to him (while he's sitting in jail) with a piece of land to sell. Now that doesn't sound like a wise move, does it—to fork out money for a piece of land that's about to be taken by a foreign enemy?

Yet, God told Jeremiah to buy the land, to have the deed witnessed and notarized and then put away in a safe place. Later, the land would be there for your family. We can understand Jeremiah's response: "Lord, why in the world do you want me to do this? This land won't be worth a dime next month when we're all hauled off to Babylon."

God's response? "Jeremiah, it's because these people have sinned against me that I have brought this calamity down on them. Nevertheless, you can be sure that I will also do all the good that I have promised. My people will come back to this land. You can be sure of it because I have promised it!"

Then God moved Jeremiah to pen the powerful words that open our text, words that are

repeated often throughout the book of Jeremiah, ***“the days are coming, declares the LORD.”*** Every time Jeremiah speaks those words, he’s referring to some promise of God and how God is going to fulfill that promise. In this case it’s the days in which the LORD would bring his people back to Jerusalem, the days in which he would send a Savior who would not only undo sin’s curse, but would also establish his perfect, heavenly kingdom.

“The days are coming.” That phrase is so powerful. There’s no room for doubt. God will keep his promise. It doesn’t matter how impossible it looks. It doesn’t matter that the enemy is knocking down Jerusalem’s front door. It doesn’t matter that the Savior was to come from David’s line. Yet, in a couple months there would no longer be (in fact, there would never again be) a physical king in Jerusalem from David’s line. ***“The days are coming.”*** God promised it. Jeremiah could count on it. And so can we.

The days are coming, my friends. Those are powerful words for you, too. Are you waiting on God to fulfill a promise he has made to you? The days are coming. Are you waiting for God to answer some special prayer? The days are coming. Are you waiting for God to help you out of some personal trial or difficulty? The days are coming. ***“I am with you always”*** Jesus promised. ***“Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you.”*** God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but will provide a way out so that you can stand up under that temptation. Think of the pages and pages of promises that God has spoken to you. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have to you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” What a comfort to be reminded that God will absolutely, undoubtedly keep every one of them.

Isn’t that the reason this time of the year is so powerful for us as Christians? Unlike Jeremiah, we have the privilege of seeing and celebrating the fulfillment of the greatest promise God ever made—a promise that required no less than an impossible miracle, a promise that required the eternal God to take on human flesh and blood and become both God and man. Christmas is the celebration of God keeping this promise he made through Jeremiah.

Yes, a righteous Branch, descendant of King David, entered our world, became one of us and lived the perfect life we could not live? This Jesus led this life not to merely provide us with a perfect example. That would only discourage us even more. Have you ever been around someone very kind and considerate, only to realize more fully your own inadequacies and weaknesses? In the movie *ET* the lovable extraterrestrial creature teaches a somewhat dysfunctional California family how to get along better with each other. Jesus could have devoted his life to doing the same thing, leading by example, showing the people how to make this world a better place similar to Gandhi from India. But Jesus had a higher purpose for coming to this world. Our heavenly Father had his Son born into this world as a righteous Branch in the human race to provide righteousness that we could never gain on our own. He came to offer this righteousness to us as a free gift. “In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our righteousness.” The Lord foretold of a time when people would be saved and through a righteousness that was not their own that came from him.

Scan the people who are around you daily at work, at school, even in your own family. How many still live under the notion that they can produce a certain amount of righteousness or goodness in their lives that will enable God to love them and accept them? So goes the saying: “In order to get to heaven you have to live right.” A man once came to Jesus asking, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus told him to keep the commandments. Jesus did say not try your best. He told him to keep them perfectly. Love God with your whole heart, soul and mind, and

then love your neighbor as yourself. The problem with trying to follow God's law to make ourselves worthy is that we never measure up to what the law requires. Galatians tell us clearly, "All who rely observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'" If we do not measure up to what is in the Book of the Law, we will get the boot. That is why we need righteousness outside of us, a righteousness that comes from God himself, that is provided for us freely in Jesus his Son.

On Judgment day, when everyone stands before God, there will only be two kinds of righteousness present. There will be those who have followed the path of believing that the righteousness they produce in their lives is acceptable to God. Scripture is very blunt when it tells us how deficient this righteousness is. "There is none that does good no not one." Then there are those who will be standing before God not in their righteousness, but in the righteousness of Christ, the righteous Branch. They will hear the words, "Come you are blessed by my Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." You and I who believe the promise God gave to Jeremiah, are going to hear that decree.

"Professional golfer Paul Azinger was diagnosed with cancer at age 33. He had just won a PGA championship and had ten tournament victories to his credit. He was doing well. He wrote, "A genuine feeling of fear came over me. I could die from cancer. Then another reality hit me even harder. I'm going to die eventually anyway, whether from cancer or something else. It's just a question of when. Everything I had accomplished in golf became meaningless to me. All I wanted to do was live."

Then he remembered something that Larry Moody, who teaches a Bible study on the tour, had said to him. "Zinger, we're not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We're in the land of the dying wanting to get to the land of the living." "Zinger" recovered from chemotherapy and returned to the PGA tour. He's done pretty well. But that bout with cancer changed him. He wrote, "I've made a lot of money since I've been on the tour, and I've won a lot of tournaments, but that happiness is always temporary. The only way you will ever have true contentment is knowing Jesus Christ. I'm not saying that nothing ever bothers me and I don't have problems, but I feel like I now know the answer to the six-foot hole". The answer to the six foot hole is Jesus who promises to be the resurrection and the life for us.

My friends, don't get sidetracked this Christmas season by smaller, busy, promises of the season, of the world. Wherever you are in life, whether you're frazzled because life seems to be asking too much of you, whether you're filled with anxiety because of something that's happening in your life, whether you feel ashamed and dirty because some sin has become your master, or you're just trying to be the light for Jesus that God has called you to be, your greatest comfort is this: with God no promise is too good to be true. Hold on to those promises and believe them! You can count on them. Amen.