

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures³ regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David,⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.⁵ Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.⁶ And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV84)

Theme: God's Promises fulfilled

1. He will send his Son.
2. He will make us saints.

Advent is a season of waiting for promises to be fulfilled. God promises to send his Son. As God's children waited for Christ's coming 2000 years ago, we wait for his second coming today. But how many times have you been let down or disappointed by someone when promises were made, but not kept? Like the girlfriend who says, "I promise that I will always love you," the husband who tells his wife, "I promise to take out the trash when the show is over" or the driver who tells the officer, "I promise to slow down from now on," promises are constantly broken. It's so bad that it is refreshing when someone actually keeps or fulfills his promise.

That is what we see today. All of God's Promises are fulfilled. Two stand out—He will send his Son and he will make us saints.

We don't have the best track record when it comes to keeping promises. No matter to whom a promise is made, we often fail to keep that promise. At times we never really intend to keep our promises; we just say what we think someone else wants to hear. Sometimes we have the right mindset and fully intend to keep our promises, but we fail to carry it out. We promise loved ones, "I'll be there for you, I'll

help you out, I'll get the job done for you." But we get too busy, we aren't able to figure it out, or we simply forget—and the promise is broken. We promise God we will get better at worship attendance, at studying his Word at home and in Bible class, and volunteering our time at his house. But you can get extra hours at work, or another hour of sleep, or get some work done around the house. Promises made; promises broken.

But it's not just us. Others break promises as well. And it's not too hard to figure it out. You soon realize who you can trust to keep their promises and who you can't. Again, they don't always mean to break their promises. Some honestly forgot, or they tried; but they failed. All of us know someone who you can't trust their promises—they have a track record, that you just can't trust—whether he has good intentions or not. Then there are those whom we trust. But at times, they too can let us down and fail to keep their promises.

We have a history of breaking our promises. And others have a history of breaking their promises to us. So we learn to be skeptical. And so we may become skeptical of even God's promises. At times we may doubt if his word will come true at all. We don't have any experience with someone always keeps his promises. So why would God be any different? And so we doubt. Will Christ really come again? Does God really keep his promises to watch over us and protect us?

God makes many promises in his Word—both in the Old and New Testaments. In our text for today we see that all of these promises are centered around one person—Jesus Christ. Listen carefully to Paul in verses two and three. **The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son.** Paul was called to spread the gospel. That is, the good news of God's love and mercy for sinners through his Son, Jesus Christ. It is a promise that through his Son God would forgive the sins of the whole world. That through faith in him—apart from any works, all people will be saved. All other gospel promises are in one way or another centered around this one promise. Christ is the center of the Old Testament and so all Old Testament promises are connected to him.

One of the promises God gave concerning Christ is that he would be the descendant of David. Paul refers to this promise in verse three. There he is talking about Christ, **who as to his human nature was a descendant of David.** Perhaps two promises of God in the Old Testament stand out in this connection. The first, from 2 Samuel 7, was spoken to David himself. **When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.** About 400 years later, God made a similar promise through the prophet Jeremiah. **The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.** Of course we know that Jesus was born from the line of David—both Mary and Joseph were his descendants. That means God kept his promise. Jesus was true man.

But that wasn't the only promise God gave about David's Son. We see another amazing promise in our first lesson for today. Matthew points to it's fulfillment in today's gospel. After Gabriel appeared to Joseph to announce to him the birth of his Jesus, Matthew comments, **All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”** Jesus is God with us. When Jesus was born God was born. In Jesus, God became man; he took on flesh and lived among us for awhile. So the promise is this: Jesus is both man and God. He is the physical descendant of David, and yet the Son of God and God himself. People certainly had their doubts about Jesus. That little babe lying in the manger certainly doesn't look like God. It didn't seem as if he was the one who would save God's people. And he still didn't at the end of his life. He hung on the cross beaten, bruised, and bleeding. People hurled insults at him and mocked him. He didn't seem like the Messiah. He certainly didn't look like God. But then he rose from the dead and put any doubts to rest. As Paul says, **through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.**

God kept his promise. The descendant of David is also Immanuel—God with us. And he was sent to fulfill a specific promise—to save us from our sins.

And that's a good thing, because of who and what we are by nature. By nature we are nothing but God's enemies. We were conceived in sin. We were born as those who hated God. There was nothing good that lived in us. We could do nothing but sin. We were God's enemies. We were all children of the devil who followed the sinful practices of the world around us. And so we deserve God's wrath and punishment. We all deserve eternal damnation. To be sent to suffer with the devil forever. We are nothing but poor miserable sinners who look after their own interests first. Even after God made us his own dear children, we still sin against him. Numerous times a day we fail to live up to the level of perfection that he demands. So we deserve eternal punishment for who we are and what we do and fail to do. For we are nothing but sinners.

But God doesn't look at us as sinners. Notice what term Paul uses to refer the Christians in Rome. **To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.** And what stood for the Christians in Rome still stands for us today. God calls us saints. We are saints. Yes, we are who sinners, are called saints. We are sinners and saints at the same time.

How? The Bible doesn't use this term the way many use it today. Many use this term to refer to someone who is especially pious. They consider someone a saint if he was uncommonly kind and generous to many people, never caught in a major sin, and so on. Others grant sainthood based on the person's faith, acts of love, and miracles. For some, you have to have at least two miracles attached to your name in order to be labeled a saint.

But being a saint has nothing to do with who you are and what you have done. It doesn't depend on the amount of miracles attached to you or the acts of love, or your heroic virtue. Rather it depends on David's son—Immanuel and what he has done for you. Jesus Christ grew up and lived a perfect life. He would give his perfect life to you and all people as he took all our sins upon himself. Then he suffered through hell and died for our sins. As a result God doesn't see you as

a sinner. He no longer looks at you as you were born—as his enemy. Rather he sees you as his own dear child. He doesn't see your sins, he sees the robe Christ' righteousness wrapped around you. He considers you perfect and holy. You are a saint in God's eyes.

And saint isn't the only thing God calls you. You are also part of God's elect. Or put another way, you are the chosen ones of God. As Paul says in verse six, **you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.** Literally Paul says, **you also are the called of Jesus Christ.** You are the elect of Christ—the ones chosen by him to be his own children. You belong to Christ. You are his through faith. You are his not because you were good people. He chose you not because he knew that you would believe in him. He chose you from before the beginning of the world. You are his because he chose you out of his grace. You now belong to him. And because you are part of the elect, you know that God will watch over you and protect you, until he takes you to live with him in heaven forever.

We saw earlier that Paul refers to the Romans as those **who are loved by God and called to be saints.** And if the Romans Christians are loved by God, then so are you. But Paul doesn't just call you loved by God. You are the beloved of God. You are his loved ones. God's holds you dear to his heart. That is God's promise to you. And unlike the girlfriend who promises to always love you, you know that God will truly always love you. And always means forever—an eternity in heaven.

Advent is a season of waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled. He promises to send his Son to save us. And unlike the promises we make or those made by others, we know that God fulfills all of his promises. For God it isn't promises made, promises broken—but promises made, promises kept. Christ is coming just as God promised. We celebrate his birth in a few short days. And soon celebrate his second coming and join all the other saints in signing his praises forever. Amen.