

Two Promises of a Faithful God

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Well, thank you very much, John. Folks, do have that Bible passage open in front of you. We're going to be diving into it. As has been said, my name is Alistair, and it is now my joy to take us through this passage of God's word.

Now, I wonder if some of you have enjoyed the bliss over the last few years of the dentist surgeries being shot. But maybe until just a few weeks ago, where your heart skipped a beat as you got the ping on your phone saying you would do a checkup.

No offense to the dentist here, Hannah. I am really sorry. But since I was a child, I have had a fear of the dentist, of their tools, of the pain that you get when you take a trip to that appointment.

Or maybe you're like me. Growing up, you're told, aren't you? Don't worry, it won't hurt. I promise. And that initially puts you at ease, doesn't it?

Because we like to have the reassurance of someone older, someone more experienced than us say, everything will be fine. Or maybe that promise of don't worry, I'll be there with you the whole time also puts you at ease.

[1 : 1 7] But then the day comes, the appointment is upon you and you sit in the waiting room and you start to sweat. You hear the sounds of the tools going on in the distance and suddenly you have that urge to bolt out the door.

As you imagine what tools those little noises are coming from. And maybe you can hear some groans. And then you get into the chair in the dentist's office and somehow every dentist thinks that now is a convenient time to have a conversation with you.

With all the, they try to talk with you as you've got all these tools in your mouth. There must be a dentist language course because every single one of them seems to understand what you're saying and how you respond.

But then the work begins and the promise that it won't hurt isn't fulfilled. Now that is a very silly example, but we all know the pain, physical or emotional, of a broken promise, don't we?

We know the heartbreak that it can cause, the unease that it leaves you with, the emotional scars that you can carry maybe even years after. Well, this morning as we turn to the Bible, to God's word, we're diving into Act 18 and we are going to see two promises of a faithful God that can and should change your life.

[2 : 4 5] These are promises that you can rely on. They aren't the assurances of a parent trying to make you feel better, but they are trustworthy and life-changing promises.

So in Act 18 we travel with Paul, one of the early leaders of the church, to a place called Corinth, a city in Greece. And as we've journeyed through the book of Acts as a church together, the same theme has come up again and again, hasn't it?

The gospel grows as it is opposed. But why would Paul continue to tell people about Jesus when he knows he's going to face opposition?

Well, it's because Paul knows that God always comes through on his promises and that gives him confidence to continue. The key verses in our passage this morning that shape Paul's ministry and that should shape our lives as well are in verses 9 and 10.

Read those with me. God says to Paul, The promises that spur Paul on are the promises that God is with him and that God has people in the city who he wants to save.

[4 : 12] Those promises are true for God's people today as well. And we're going to see why it's so important that we put our trust in God and base our lives on his promises.

We'll spend the remainder of our time looking at those two promises and how they shaped Paul's life at Corinth. So the first promise we see is that God is with you.

Look again at verses 9 to 10. God says to Paul, Do not be afraid. Keep on speaking. Do not be silent. For I am with you. Now, why would Paul need this reminder?

This isn't a new promise from God. It's something that Paul already knows and has experienced in his life. So why the reminder at this particular moment in time? Well, it's because of the environment that Paul finds himself in in Corinth.

See, Corinth was one of the biggest cities in ancient Greece with around 200,000 people at this time. A strategic, social and political capital of the ancient world.

[5 : 21] But it was also known for its promiscuity. See, it had a lot of temples to pagan gods, but the most prominent was to Aphrodite, the goddess of fertility, love and sex.

Corinth was a city, was known as a city of sexual promiscuity and fornication. Now, Christians often today think that we're living in a really hard environment.

A world of confusion that's changed its mind on sexual ethics, on gender, on the birth of children, on the definition of marriage, with an ever-growing rate of divorce and adultery.

Christians and some non-Christians can look at this world and find it to be a really hard environment. But this isn't a new development.

And it's not unique to the UK. There is nothing new under the sun. Corinth was known for being a very sexualized city where a person's desires mattered most.

[6 : 27] So well known that to play the Corinthian had become a slur and shorthand for fornication. So that's the environment that Paul finds himself in verse 1.

And so it makes sense, doesn't it, in light of that context that Paul would later write in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 3, that when he first went to Corinth, he came to them in weakness, with great fear and trembling.

Paul was probably so nervous walking into this city because of their pride and their immorality. So what does he do? How does Paul speak to this city about Jesus?

How can we as Christians go into this world which is living in active rebellion against Jesus and talk to them about their need to hear his call? How should you, Lisa, after your public declaration of faith before this congregation today, go into the workplace and into the world and share Jesus?

Well, we do exactly what has been done from the very beginning. See, Paul doesn't do anything different. He doesn't soften his message, but he continues to preach the gospel, the good news of Jesus to everyone around him.

[7 : 46] He's not afraid of offending people. His message doesn't change. Instead, he is clinging to that promise that God is with him and that God will help him.

And so in verse 2, Paul meets some fellow tent makers and he stays and works with them in order to provide for himself. But look at his main focus in verse 4. Read it with me.

Every Sabbath, he reasoned in the synagogue trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. And then in verse 5, Silas and Timothy, some of his gospel friends, bring Paul a financial gift from other churches.

And we read about that in 2 Corinthians 11, which enables Paul to, verse 5, devote himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

So Paul went through different seasons. Sometimes working to support himself, other times being supported so that he could devote himself to sharing Jesus full time.

[8 : 51] But regardless of what kind of season he was in, he was consistently sharing the message of Jesus. Now what is that message? The message that Lisa has already talked about.

The message that we see at the end of verse 5, that Jesus is the Messiah. See, Jesus was not just a good guy or a good moral teacher.

Jesus is God who came into our world because our world is broken and because we are broken. The Bible says that all have fallen short of God's glory.

Every single person alive is born into rebellion against God. That is our natural state. And therefore, everyone is rightly under the wrath of God.

That is the hard message of the Christian faith. And if we stop there, there is no hope. If we stop there, there is no life.

[9 : 51] There is no point. There is no happy ending. But the truth that Paul proclaimed, that Lisa has talked about, and that I want you to consider this morning, is that God did not just leave us in our mess.

He stepped into our world in Jesus. He lived the perfect life that we could never live. He was crucified, taking the death that every single one of us deserves.

Taking our sin, our brokenness upon himself, so that all who deny themselves and follow him can be forgiven. Given a right relationship with God.

And so that everyone who is a Christian is given true life. And life forever. And Jesus didn't stay dead. He was resurrected to life, proving that all he said was true.

Proving how all the Old Testament promises about God's Messiah, God sent one, the one who would come to save God's people, are all true.

[10 : 59] That's why Paul can stand in a synagogue and preach Jesus as the Messiah to the Jews in Corinth with confidence. That's why Lisa has decided to deny herself and follow Jesus.

That is why I am here this morning, begging you to consider how you will respond to Jesus Christ. Jesus really is the Messiah.

He really did die. He really did rise from the dead. And he really does call you to him. To put your trust in him. To find forgiveness and true life.

Will you listen this morning? So the reason Paul can stand and preach with boldness is because God has promised to be with him. Now friends, no matter what kind of season you are in at the moment, no matter where God has placed you, know that God is with his people.

It may be that you're in a very difficult work environment where you're afraid to speak about the gospel because of what your colleagues or your bosses will say. Know that God is with you.

[12 : 08] Maybe you're unemployed and you're finding that really hard, but you're trying to consciously make an effort and find time to spend time with friends and family members and share Jesus with them.

Know that God is with you. Maybe you're a mom who's trying to spend time befriending other parents, sharing Jesus. Maybe that's your season of ministry and daily making an effort to teach your children about the good news of Jesus.

Seasons of ministry aren't only about employment or formal ministry. Every Christian is called to go about the daily work of living for and sharing Jesus.

And we do it with confidence because of that promise that God is with us. Maybe you're struggling. Maybe you're tired of being opposed for your faith, ridiculed by people around you.

Maybe you feel that you keep being put on trial and falsely accused like Paul is in verses 12 to 17. Maybe you're close to throwing in the towel yourself because things just seem so hard.

[13 : 23] Friends, remember God is with you. That's a promise of a faithful promise keeping God and nothing will ever prove that to be wrong.

God is with you. Look at the final command that Jesus gave the disciples in Matthew's gospel from Matthew 28. Then Jesus came to them, the disciples, and said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go. Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. The same is true today. Stand up, speak out, be bold, because God is with you.

And the second promise that we see in this passage from God is that God has people. Look at the end of verse 10.

[14 : 29] God says, I have many people in this city. So Paul preaches in the synagogue to the Jews and verse five says, testifying to them that Jesus was the Messiah.

But then their response is abuse. Look at verse six. But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, your blood be on your own heads.

I am innocent of it. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles. The Jews opposed Paul and become abusive. But as God says in verse 10, they wouldn't attack him in Corinth.

That's specific to Corinth because he is attacked later on and harmed in other places. But after their abuse, Paul in verse six basically says, I've done my part. I have consistently and faithfully shared Jesus with you.

You are responsible for your own sins. So Paul goes to the Gentiles, to those who aren't Jews, and begins to share Jesus. But do you see, he doesn't actually go very far.

[15 : 38] In fact, he sets up shop right next door. Look at verse seven. Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titus Justus, a worshiper of God.

Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord, and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. Now, why would Paul spend time in a place where he has just been mistreated and abused?

Why would he stay in a city for a year and a half, as verse 11 says, and continue to teach? Because God has promised that he has many people in that city.

See, God knows that there are people living in this sin-stained city of Corinth who are living immoral lives, who are acting in rebellion against God and worshiping pagan idols, living for themselves and nothing else.

God knows that one day they will hear the news of Jesus and they will respond. God knows that there are people in Corinth who will come to believe in Jesus. People will turn from their sin and follow him.

[16 : 53] See, this tells us that God knows who his people are. Like a good father, he loves and cares for and calls his children to himself. That's why Paul is to stay and keep on speaking about Jesus.

But notice that God doesn't tell Paul who these people are. That's because we will never know who God's people are beforehand and we don't need to know.

Our responsibility is to share Jesus with everyone we can, whenever we can, wherever we can. And if we shared this deep love that God has for people, then I think we would want to share Jesus with them, would we not?

Not wanting anyone to suffer in judgment for eternity, but for people to have a relationship with God and to live in his presence forever. Too often, Christians, we can look at the world we live in and see it a bit like Gotham City from Batman.

A city rampant with crime, where the bad guys rule the show, where sin is always on the cards, where no one cares for God. It's easy to look into our world and see an environment where sin thrives.

[18 : 12] And we can cringe at that. And sometimes Christians have even retreated from the world and created a holy huddle. But we're not told to do that. But we should be looking at this world, at our city, and seeing people that God loves, that God wants us to tell about Jesus.

Because whilst this promise is specific to Corinth, the principle is the same. God has many people in this city, in this nation, and in this world.

We need to tell them about Jesus and have the same love that God has for them. God promises that He has people in Corinth.

And the good news of Jesus is bearing fruit. Verse 8 tells us that people believed and were baptized. And we know that it wasn't very long before a whole church was established in Corinth.

And that continues today. God has people around us. Look at this room. Look at this city.

[19 : 21] Other churches in Edinburgh. Look at Lisa's testimony. Different people have been used by God through the years to teach others about Jesus. And it is bearing fruit.

Think back to where we started off this morning about the promise that the dentist appointment won't hurt. It's a silly example. But it highlights a general principle that we all know the pain, physical or emotional, of broken promises.

We know the heartache it can cause, the unease that it leaves you with, and the emotional scars that you carry. The Bible is full of promises that God makes to His people, and He keeps every single one of them.

God is a faithful, promise-keeping God who promises to be with His people, and that He has people in this city, in this nation, and in this world who will be saved.

Our job is just to act in confidence, to put our trust in Jesus, to believe, to be baptized, and to go, and to share Jesus with the world.

[20 : 29] It won't always be easy, and it won't be quick. But because of God's promises, we can confidently declare Jesus to the world.

Now, I know some of you are here this morning, and you've been praying for a family member, or a friend to become a Christian for many years. You've been praying and speaking the gospel to them, and you're wondering whether you should continue, or whether it's time to throw in the towel.

Let me end with a story that I read earlier on this week of Evelyn and Bernie Carter. They had been married for 67 years.

Now, Evelyn was a Christian, and her husband wasn't. For years and years, she prayed for him and continued to share the gospel with him.

The church that she was a part of continued to witness to him as well, and the pastor many times went and prayed with Bernie. Just a few months ago, at the age of 93, Bernie put his trust in Jesus.

[21 : 41] He believed and was baptized. What gave Evelyn the strength to keep on witnessing? What gave Paul the confidence to stay in Corinth and preach the gospel?

What gives you the strength tomorrow to go into your workplace, or wherever you're going, and to boldly proclaim Jesus to this world? It's the promises that God is with you, and that he has people.

Those promises should change your life. Never give up, because God is with you, and because he has his people. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your promises. We thank you that we can bring our lives, that we can live as you want us to, because you have promised to be with us.

That you have promised to give us strength by your Holy Spirit to live the life that you have called us to live. And Father, I pray for every single person here that we would consider where we stand before you this morning.

[22 : 52] That if we do not yet know you, we would put our trust in you. And Father, that if we do know you, you would give us boldness this week and opportunities to share the hope and life that we have.

And we realize that that is only because of Jesus. And it's in his name and for your glory that we pray. Amen.