

When God Makes a Promise

Luke 2:22-40

Introduction

Deb Turner is the Promotions Director at WJLT 105.3 in Evansville, IN. She recently posted the following to her station's blog site:

I was having one of those days where I just couldn't wait to get home after work. Well, while driving home, I noticed a huge beautiful rainbow in the sky.

You'd think by now that after decades of seeing rainbows it would be no big deal. But, it still is! When I saw this huge colorful arc in the sky last Friday evening, I just seemed to let go of all the stuff that I was thinking about. Stuff that really wasn't worth worrying about! All I wanted to do was snap a picture of that gorgeous rainbow!

The truth is the next time I see another rainbow up in the sky, I will probably get very excited again! It still gets me every time.

I agree. No matter how busy I am, a rainbow always makes me stop and watch for a while.

Now ... just because I'm a curious guy, I went to every high school student's favorite resource for term paper information – Wikipedia – and looked up “rainbows.” Fascinating stuff! I read all about the colors in a rainbow, double rainbows, monochrome rainbows, supernumerary rainbows, the difference between reflected and reflection rainbows, circumhorizontal and circumzenithal arcs. I even read through the mathematical principles behind the appearance of each rainbow.

And just when I was about to doze off, I read the words I was hoping to see. I read:

One of the earliest literary occurrences of a rainbow is found the Book of Genesis chapter 9, as part of the flood story of Noah. There it is a sign of God's promise to never destroy all life on earth with a global flood again. (Wikipedia)

I will be honest with you. In all the times I have stopped to look at rainbows, never before now have I pondered the mathematical derivation that was unfolding before my eyes. No, almost without exception I think about the God who so loves me that He takes extraordinary measures – measures beyond my ability to comprehend – to remind me of His promises to watch over my life.

I find that to be very reassuring, because I know and I believe that my God keeps His promises.

- Joshua, that great leader of the people of Israel, knew and believed that too. When he was about to retire, he assembled all the leaders of Israel and reminded them:

Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all of them came to pass. (Joshua 21:45)

I think Simeon, the man we meet in today's gospel believed that as well. You see God had promised him that he would live long enough to see the arrival of the Messiah:

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. (Luke 2:26)

We don't know how much time passed between the giving of the promise and the fulfillment of it. We only know that Simeon received and he believed it. And he lived his life in the confident assurance that God always keeps his promises. Simeon knew that one day he would see Jesus.

As I thought about the promise made in this text I made these observations:

OBSERVATION #1: WHEN GOD MAKES A PROMISE ... THE RESULT MIGHT LOOK DIFFERENT THAN YOU EXPECT, BUT YOU WILL KNOW IT WHEN YOU SEE IT

When the parents brought in the child Jesus ... Simeon took him in his arms and praised God... (Luke 2:27-28)

No one living at that time thought the Messiah would come in the form of an infant. The standard image for the Jews was a general on a white horse, not a baby in a manger. If Simeon was waiting for Jesus to be on a white horse, it would never happen. He would, some 33 years after this event, ride on a donkey ... but that would be as close as it would come.

It doesn't appear that Simeon waited around the Temple all day every day like Anna did. When we read about her, the text says:

She never left the temple but worshiped night and day... (Luke 22:37)

But this particular day was different. The Holy Spirit was stirring the heart of Simeon to move away from his standard daily routine and prompting him to go to the Temple.

Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. (Luke 22:27)

There was no white horse in the parking lot, so maybe Simeon was a bit confused. But any confusion ended when Simeon saw the baby Jesus. He knew this was the Messiah God had promised. And he knew once again that God had kept His promise.

Many times you and I don't know what to expect. We know that God has promised:

- To provide for our needs (Philippians 4:19)
- To be with us at all times (Joshua 1:9)

- To forgive us when we confess our sins (1 John 1:9)
- To hear us when we pray (2 Chronicles 7:14)
- To lead us in good and right directions (Psalm 23)

We know what we THINK that looks like. We know what we WANT it to look like. But truthfully, we don't know how God is going to do what He has promised to do.

But there is often this moment God's Spirit begins to move and you sense it. And even when it looks totally different, you know deep down inside that this is what God has promised.

OBSERVATION #2: WHEN GOD MAKES A PROMISE ...IT MIGHT TAKE A WHILE TO HAPPEN BUT THE TIMING WILL ALWAYS BE RIGHT

We don't know how long Simeon had to wait. The text simply says:

He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. (Luke 22:25b)

We assume Simeon was an older man because, having seen the Messiah, he offers praise to God, and then tells God he is ready to die:

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation ... (Luke 2:29-30)

Would you agree that waiting is the hardest part of a promise? It is for me. We make a lot of mistakes in that waiting period.

- We try to take matters into our own hands. That's what Abraham and Sarah did. Their plan resulted in the birth of Ishmael.
- We begin to doubt whether God cares or sees or hears.

We would do well to remember the words to this little chorus:

*In Your time, In Your time
You make all things beautiful in Your time
Lord, please show me everyday
As You're teaching me You're way
That You do just what You say in Your time.*

I've been thinking about that a lot in this last week. The whole story is too long to relay in a sermon, but there is a ministry-related item that has been on my heart for a number of years. One day this past week, there were three different encounters where that opportunity was put before me – three in one day. My immediate response was "This is not the right time." But then I remember: When God makes a promise, His timing is always right.

OBSERVATION #3: WHEN GOD MAKES A PROMISE ...ITS FULFILLMENT IS FILLED WITH BLESSINGS

There was an abundance of blessing ...

- Simeon was blessed (v. 28)
- Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph (v. 34)
- Anna was blessed (v. 38)
- The people Anna told were blessed (v. 38)
- The baby Jesus was also blessed (v. 40)

You and I are also among those blessed because this child came.

All that blessing flowing out of one promised fulfilled.

APPLICATION

The promise God gave to Simeon was unique and specific to him. We don't know of any other person to whom God gave such a promise:

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. (Luke 2:26)

Here is the lesson for us: God always keeps His promises.

- Are you worried that you might not have the strength for what is coming your way? Philippians 4:13 promises that God's strength will be at work in you.
- Do you feel alone? Joshua 1:9 promises that God will never leave you.
- Are you wrestling with a big decision and uncertain about what to do? Proverbs 3:5-6 promises that God will direct your paths.

The Bible contains more than 7,000 promises. (refer to "All the Promises of the Bible.") And God keeps them all.

We are, right now, 24 days away from the beginning of the season of Lent. I want to encourage you to take on a faith-building exercise to prepare your heart for this coming season.

Record one promise of God that has meaning for you every day.

24 promises. The first few will be easy, but you will really have to think by day 24. If you get stuck, get the library book out or google it. Here is mine for today:

Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?*

*²My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

³ *He will not let your foot slip—
he who watches over you will not slumber;*
⁴ *indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*
⁵ *The Lord watches over you—
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;*
⁶ *the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.*
⁷ *The Lord will keep you from all harm—
he will watch over your life;*
⁸ *the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.*

And with hearts that are primed by those truths, we can be ready enter into a season with the greatest of all promises is fulfilled.

Amen.