

The David Promise: Made, Broken, Kept
(2 Samuel 7, Psalm 89, Luke 1-2)

Turn to 2 Samuel 7. Today we will see a picture of God's faithfulness, and how his faithfulness looks to his children. It's not how God's faithfulness looks to God himself, nor how it looks to people who are not his children. But this is how God's faithfulness looks to his children.

I had been planning to do the second message on "heaven" today, but since this is the last Sunday before Christmas, it seemed better to remember something from the Bible's birth stories of Jesus. Next Sunday we'll speak again about heaven. Today, the birth of Jesus in Luke.

What surprised me in Luke 1-2 was how often I read about Jesus being the royal descendant of David that God had promised the Jews – Lk 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4 (2x), 11. I wanted to read about Jesus being the saviour of the world. I did not get what I was looking for. The Bible often does that to me. It answers questions I was not asking. The Bible answers what we *should* ask.

Please turn now to 2 Samuel 7. Here is a promise God made to David about 1000 years before Jesus was born.

The Promise Made: 2 Samuel 7:8-16 – God speaks through the prophet Nathan:

“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.”

“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

That's God making the promise. Now to Psalm 89.

The Promise Broken: Psalm 89

This was composed about 400 years after God made that promise to David.

V19 - *Once you spoke in a vision, to your faithful people you said: "I have bestowed strength on a warrior; I have raised up a young man from among the people. I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him. My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him. The enemy will not get the better of him; the wicked will not oppress him. I will crush his foes before him, and strike down his adversaries. My faithful love will be with him, and through my name his horn will be exalted. I will set his hand over the sea, his right hand over the rivers. He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Saviour.' And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure. "If his sons forsake my law, and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant, or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—³⁶ that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky."*

But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been angry with your anointed one. You have renounced the covenant with your servant and defiled his crown in the dust. You have broken through all his walls and reduced his strongholds to ruins. All who pass by have plundered him; he has become the scorn of his neighbours. You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice. Indeed, you have turned back the edge of his sword and have not supported him in battle. You have put an end to his splendour and cast his throne to the ground. You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with a mantle of shame.

How long, LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? Remember how fleeting is my life. For what futility you have created all humanity! Who can live and not see death, or who can escape the power of the grave? Lord, where is your former great love, which in your faithfulness you swore to David? Remember, Lord, how your servant has been mocked, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the nations, the taunts with which your enemies, LORD, have mocked, with which they have mocked every step of your anointed one.

Now to Luke 1. We will jump forward 600 years from Ps 89, about 1000 years since Nathan told David what God was promising.

The Promise Kept: Luke 1

Verse 26 - *In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

Mary was troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

God's Faithfulness and Psalm 89

The remarkable thing about Ethan the Ezrahite, who composed Psalm 89, is that he holds God totally responsible for what happened to David's line. In the Psalms, this is not remarkable at all, it is common. Job also holds God completely responsible for his troubles. Perhaps what's remarkable is how reluctant we are to do this.

We will blame a sinful fallen world, and we will blame government. We will blame big business and little bureaucrats. But God is the last one we will blame. This Psalm says, "God, you have not been faithful to your promises." And provides specific examples.

And God said, "This is a very good psalm, this is an excellent prayer, my people need to pray this, I will put this in my book." Part of God's faithfulness is that he invites us to pray to him like this. He not only permits it, he urges it and he instructs it.

When we blame the fallen world, and we blame the government, we are saying, "My God is weak and helpless. Trouble is lord of the earth, bureaucrats and governments and big businesses are the lords of the earth, poor me, so sad that my God is weak and helpless."

We say Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and has full rights to our lives. We mean it, and it makes our hearts warm to say it. Let's make sure we don't deny it when there are big troubles in our lives.

Ethan the Ezrahite could have blamed David's troubles on a fallen world and bad governments. But he didn't. God actually prefers to be held responsible for things like this. Let's be more like Ethan.

God's Faithfulness and the Whole Story

What kind of picture of God's faithfulness comes the whole story here, from 2 Samuel and Psalm 89 and Luke 1? God made a promise to David, God kept it for a while, and then for a long time by all appearances God had forgotten all about that promise.

And then, in what we call the Christmas story, God jumped into Jewish history and started keeping that promise again.

That's how God's faithfulness looks to his children. To God's children, it sometimes looks like he is not faithful to his promises. I expect that God understands himself to be faithful 100% of the time. How would God explain what we have in Psalm 89?

I don't know, I will not guess. God knows it will sometimes look to us like God is breaking his promises, plain and simple, and it is okay to tell him that's sure what it looks like. Psalm 89 proves that.

And you can bet that all the Jews in Luke's birth of Jesus story knew and prayed Psalm 89. They still hoped, but that psalm was a part of their worship. It was a part of every Jew's worship.

BUT, let's give God credit here. God remembered the David promise, and he kept it. Gabriel came and told Mary that her child would be the great David king. Mary's Joseph was in David's line. When the Spirit came on Zechariah, he prophesied that this child would be the great David king.

And Caesar Augustus used a census to get Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, David's town, to fulfil the prophecy in Micah 5 that the Christ would be born there. God is Caesar's Lord, though Caesar does not know that. And the angel told the shepherds outside Bethlehem that in the town of David a Saviour had been born; he is the Christ.

It looked like God had forgotten the David promise, but he had not. And in spite of Psalm 89, all these people were still waiting and longing for the Christ in David's line. They did not understand, but they still believed and waited. They lived faithfully before God because they were sure that God was still faithful.

Even Psalm 89 says at the end, "how long, Lord, how long?" Even despairing Ethan the Ezrahite knows that eventually God will act on the David promise, it's just taking so long, far too long.

God is inviting us here, to count on his loving us and being faithful to us. It can look like his love and faithfulness are over. That's not new – an old problem. At the end, though, he will have kept every promise he made to his children. Make this Christmas a time to decide again that he's reliable, he will always love us and be faithful to us. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, thank you for Psalm 89. Thank you for giving us such a strong and direct prayer to you when it all looks like you have forsaken your promises to us. Only a very faithful God would invite a prayer like that. And this whole story gives us hope, because you remember old promises that we can hardly remember. You have not forgotten. Your people have done a lot of waiting, Father, but at the same time, you have kept so many old promises. You keep promises we did not even know existed.

Thank you for your Son Jesus, the David king for Israel, and the Savior of the world, your light to us Gentiles. We put our trust in you again. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.