

**Paul's Longest Sermon Teaches Us:
God Fulfills His Promises!
Sermon on Acts 13:23-33
June 12, 2005
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
Pastor Karl Walther**

Introduction: Importance of Promises

Jesus informed his apostles: *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* Amen.

Dear fellow Christians—brothers and sisters for whom God has fulfilled promises, and brothers and sisters who want to fulfill your promises for the Lord's sake:

How important are promises?

I think all of us would agree: Promises are pretty important. We'd agree: People shouldn't make promises unless they intend to fulfill them. And: it's a real shame to break a promise.

Of course, some promises are more important than others....

A mother promises to get a glass of water for her child. She might forget to fulfill her promise. But the child will probably survive. An employee promises to stop at the store and pick up something for work. He might forget to fulfill his promise. But the business will probably survive.

On the other hand, think of how many really vital promises this building has witnessed. Maybe three thousand times here, parents have promised to bring up their newly baptized baby to learn more deeply of Jesus, according to the Holy Scriptures. Maybe three thousand young people have made their promises here to continue faithful to Christ their whole lives through, because of the influence of the Holy Scriptures. Maybe a thousand and a half couples have promised in front of this altar to remain faithful to one another until death parts them, with Christ giving them the strength. A dozen pastors, at least, dozens of teachers, and several hundred leading laymen have promised in this building faithfully to discharge their duties—for Christ, and with his aid. And all of those thousands of promises are, of course, very important!

Theme – Paul's Longest Sermon Teaches Us: God Fulfills His Promises

In God's Word to us today, though, we view the fulfillment of promises which were absolutely vital for all people of all times. You see, in this section of Scripture, **PAUL'S LONGEST SERMON TEACHES US: GOD FULFILLS HIS PROMISES!** As we read, study, and apply these holy words from God, we'll find out how God fulfilled his promises, how long it took him to do so, and how he wants us to fulfill our promises—now that he has fulfilled his.

Exposition: Paul's Longest Sermon

Now, last week's Word from God to us had us starting a summer excursion of the eastern Mediterranean along with the Apostle Paul—on his first missionary journey.

It was sixteen or seventeen years since Christ Jesus died and rose. Paul had started out from his home base, Antioch of Syria—some three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. Then he sailed two hundred miles southwest, to the island of Cyprus—as we heard from Pastor Heiges last week. Now Paul sails and makes his way some three hundred miles northwest, to a city called Antioch of Pisidia: a big town with a diverse

population—including not only locals, but also retired Roman soldiers, and no few Jewish individuals.

There in Pisidian Antioch, Paul entered the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. And the congregation asked him, as a visiting rabbi, to preach. What he said that day is the longest of his sermons recorded in the Scriptures. Paul began by recounting the history of Israel, from Moses to David. Then he made the jump from David to Jesus. Here's what he said next—and as I read it to you, I want you to pay special attention to how often Paul speaks of God fulfilling his promises....

Paul said: **From David's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, AS HE PROMISED.** Ah, there's the first time: God fulfilled his promises!

Now: **Before the coming of Jesus, John the Baptist preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. As John was completing his work: literally: JOHN FULFILLED HIS COURSE;** God gave him work to do, and he did it; God promised, and then he fulfilled it; there's that theme the second time! So again, *As John was fulfilling his course, he said: "Who do you think I am? I am not that one.* "I am not the promised Savior!" **No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."**

And then, Paul says: **Brothers, children of Abraham** – those are the Jewish people in front of him – **and you God-fearing Gentiles** – that's all the rest – **it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.**

And then he proceeds to tell the message of salvation: the story of Jesus. Paul says: **The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him THEY FULFILLED THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS that are read every Sabbath.** There it is again! God made a promise, and he fulfilled it. In fact, this time he even used his enemies, so as to fulfill his promises. **Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When THEY HAD CARRIED OUT ALL THAT WAS WRITTEN ABOUT HIM** – there it is again: God's promises were fulfilled! – **When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.**

Paul concluded: **We tell you the good news: WHAT GOD PROMISED OUR FATHERS HE HAS FULFILLED FOR US, THEIR CHILDREN, BY RAISING UP JESUS.** And there you have it: the fifth and final time in this short section of Scripture. God made a promise. God fulfilled that promise. And it means nothing less than the salvation of the world!

Application One: God Fulfills His Promises Primarily through Jesus Christ

And that's it.... Pretty short, eh? But the message is so clear, isn't it? Not only does God fulfill his promises. But God fulfills his promises primarily through Jesus.

Our spiritual forefather, Abraham, the father of all believers—God promised to him – and to us! – that his line would give birth to him through whom all nations would be blessed. Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise. Jesus was born holy so that, through him, God considers us holy. Jesus fulfilled God's promises to us!

Our very-great-grandparents: Adam and Eve—they had gone so far as to get themselves infected with the hereditary disease of sin. God promised them – and he promises us, their sinful children! – a cure. Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise. Jesus suffered for us the fatality of our disease of sin. Jesus fulfilled God's promises to us!

That aged prophet Isaiah—God promised to him, and through him to us, that the Lord would raise his people to life. Jesus was the fulfillment of that promise. His God-ly power raised him from the dead. His God-ly love will raise us from the dead.

God fulfills his promises to us: primarily through Jesus!

Application Two: God Fulfills His Other Promises, Too

And then think of how many other promises God has made to us in his Word. And as the Scriptures say, the answer to all of them is “Yes”—through Jesus.

Will you always have all you need to live? God promises to you that the answer is “Yes”—through Jesus. Philippians four, nineteen, says: *My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

Will you always be able to stand firm, despite temptation and suffering? God promises to you that the answer is “Yes”—through Jesus. First Corinthians ten, thirteen, says: *God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.* And that way “out” is Jesus.

Will you really persevere in faith in Christ until the very end? The answer is “Yes”—through Jesus. First Thessalonians chapter five, verses twenty-three and twenty-four say: *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*

So, God fulfills his other promises, too, through Jesus Christ.

Application Three: God Fulfills His Promises on His Own Timetable

But he doesn’t necessarily do so according to our timetable! Today’s account is instructive in that way, too, isn’t it?

I mean: here’s the Apostle Paul preaching in Antioch in forty-seven AD. For two thousand years, God had been promising the Jewish people he’d send a Savior through them. For four thousand years, God had promised the world a Savior. Generation after generation after generation – maybe a hundred of them, maybe hundreds of them – had risen and fallen without God fulfilling that promise. The people in Antioch in front of Paul that day might have gotten to thinking, “God is never going to fulfill that Savior-promise of his.” But sure enough – at just the right time! – he did.

And it’s not all that different for us. We are waiting, too. As those people had awaited Christ’s first coming, we await his second coming. And it’s been two thousand years. And – who knows? – it could be two thousand more, or more! But someday – sure enough! – Christ will come. Someday he will glorify these miserable bodies of ours, afflicted by sin. Someday he will surgically remove from our souls our old sinful nature. Someday we will dwell face to face with God through Jesus Christ.

Meantime, God is teaching us patience. And he is teaching us confidence. And our confident patience is glorifying him.

Conclusion: Importance of Fulfilling Promises

Now to conclude: back to our promises—the promises we make....

How important are our promises? I guess they’re very important, aren’t they?!—more important than we might have considered them.... You see: we want to follow the example of God – we want to be good representatives of God! – in fulfilling our promises. That’s true, even when we’re getting a child a cup of water, even when we’re picking up something for work. But it’s especially true when we promise to bring up our children to trust in Jesus. It’s especially true when we promise to continue to trust and to serve him until the end. It’s especially true when we promise to remain faithful to one another. And it’s especially true when we promise to carry out the Lord’s work.

...But who's got the energy? Who's got concern enough for others to manage to fulfill all those promises? ...My brother, my sister, take a look at Christ on the cross! He'll inspire you to fulfill all your promises—until that day he takes you home to dwell with him! Amen.

The angels informed Jesus' apostles: *This same Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.* That's God's promise—and you can count on it! Amen.