

God Keeps His Promises

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 April 2011

Preacher: Euan Dodds

[0 : 00] Well, I remember the time I was introduced to this, Sam. And it was some years ago while I was working as a junior doctor in Inverness. And a patient came in, a policeman, who had been wrestling with a stag.

And he got a bit of antler stuck in his hand. This is the kind of thing that happens, it seems, in Inverness. And his hand got infected. And I went to see him, and it transpired. We were both Christians, and he was a very zealous believer. And he began to expound for me the life of Abraham, which he'd been studying. And after the exposition, which was very helpful, we decided to pray together.

And as we prayed, this brother took upon his lips verse 6, thanking God that the lions had fallen for him in pleasant places, and that he had a beautiful inheritance.

Well, I'd never heard that before. And so I went and looked up at Sam, and you'll be pleased to know he recovered. I went to visit him some months later, and he was fine. But actually, I should have known this psalm.

[1 : 12] Because for the early Christians, it was such an important psalm. So important, in fact, that when Peter got up to preach the first ever sermon on Pentecost, he quoted a great long chunk of it to the crowd in Jerusalem.

So important that when Paul was preaching in his missionary travels, he quoted it as well. And the early Christians saw in this psalm a prophecy about the death and resurrection of Christ.

And so I want to study this psalm today. It seems appropriate on Easter Sunday to look at the Old Testament witness to the resurrection of our Lord.

We'll study it in the book of Psalms, and then we'll look at how these first preachers used it in the Acts of the Apostles. And what I want to suggest we start by doing is considering the faithfulness of God.

It's the psalm of David, and in verse 1 it's actually a prayer. David prays, Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. David takes refuge in God.

[2 : 20] He looks to God for his security, for his confidence, for his hope. And it's a wholehearted confidence, isn't it? He says to the Lord, You are my Lord.

I have no good apart from you. David has all his confidence in the Lord, in Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel.

And in verse 3 we see that his concern is for the Lord's people. As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight.

So we have this picture of a man who is entirely dependent upon God, and entirely concerned for his people. David, the man after God's heart.

And that's in stark contrast to verse 4, where we learn of other people. We're told, You see, at this time Israel was an oasis of monotheism, of faith in the one true God, against a great desert of idolatry and paganism.

[3 : 38] And in future generations, rather than Israel taking the word of God to these pagans, Israel imbibed the paganism of the countries around it, and became apostate and wandered from the Lord.

But not David. He is entirely dependent upon God, entirely focused upon his people. The name of Yahweh is upon his lips, but not the names of these other gods.

He will have nothing to do with them. And the reason is, as David will go on to explain, because Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, is just so wonderful that he has no need to turn from him.

On Thursday, I attended a wonderful event at Caledonian University. Alan Murray, I don't know if he's here, he was performing some music, but we decided to host an international Easter

celebration.

And we invited the international students to put on traditional costume and to perform traditional Christian music. We had people from Scotland, we had Alan and a friend, we had people from India, somebody from China, and we had a good number of people from Africa.

[4 : 55] And some of our brothers and sisters from Nigeria. You can imagine the concert became quite lively. And at one point I turned round and everyone was standing up and clapping and dancing and I was kind of sitting on my own.

But one of the brothers performed a song. It was a lovely song, With Actions, which I won't attempt, but a very simple song. It was about the uniqueness and the goodness of God.

And the lyrics went something like, I look and look, but cannot find anyone like God. I walk and walk, but cannot find anyone like God.

And I turn around and turn around, but I cannot find anyone like God. If I get the music, I will pass it to the band and perhaps we could sing it in future weeks. But the message of that song was clear.

There is nobody like God. Wherever we look, we will never find anyone quite like Him. And what David is saying in this psalm is, Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, is so wonderful and so unique, I would never turn from Him.

[6 : 01] And he goes on in the following verses to list his reasons why, to describe the benefits of walking with the Lord. And really, I just want to draw out three benefits.

Firstly, in verses 5 to 6, because God has provided for him in the past. David says, The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup. You hold my lot.

The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. God is the God who gives us everything for our enjoyment.

And he alludes here to the language of Joshua 14. You recall that when God brought Israel into the land, they had to divide it up among the tribes.

And the way this happened was the leaders of Israel would pool lots, the land would be allocated, and lines laid to demarcate the different tribal regions.

[6 : 59] And what David is saying here is, God has given me somewhere wonderful to stay. The lines, the boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places. He has a beautiful inheritance, a beautiful share in the promised land.

If location is the secret of property, then David has a wonderful location in the land of promise. And we notice, of course, how secure his inheritance is.

Verse 5 tells us that God holds his lot. Not a man. God looks after his inheritance, who keeps it for him by his power.

So David knows that God has provided for him in the past. But more than that, verse 7 to 8, God guides him in the present. God, we know, is a God who freely gives wisdom to all without finding fault.

And David says in verse 7, I bless the Lord who gives me counsel. In the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me.

[8 : 08] Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. David seeks the guidance of God. The word of God is a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path.

His delight is in the law of the Lord. And upon that law, he meditates day and night. God gives him counsel, his heart instructs him.

You see, David lives very close to God, doesn't he? He knows his presence in his life. He has set the Lord before him. God is at his right hand.

And because he lives in close fellowship with God, he shall not be shaken. He finds refuge. He finds security. And thirdly, he knows that God is the God who will preserve him in the future.

I get quite a few prayer letters sent to me and there's one that always excites me when I get it. It gets sent from South Africa. And it's an organisation of Christian missionaries whose mission field are the war zones of sub-Saharan Africa.

[9 : 18] They go on missions to evangelise the soldiers, the rebels, the guerrilla fighters. And their prayer letters make for very interesting reading, I can assure you. And so often, they tell of God's wonderful preservation and deliverance.

One of them spoke of 20 people who'd been arrested and imprisoned and yet who, in response to prayer, had all been released by God's grace. Well, David had a pretty adventurous life and yet he has confidence that God will keep him.

My heart is glad, my whole being rejoices, my flesh also dwells secure, for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your Holy One see corruption.

You make known to me the paths of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. David has hope in God that he will keep his life and not abandon him to Sheol.

The God who has provided for him in the past, who guides him in the present, and who will preserve him in the future. David says, what a wonderful God, why would I ever turn from him and exchange his name for the name of idols?

[10 : 38] Those who trust in God know fullness of joy. But those who run after other gods, he says, well, their sorrows will increase.

It's quite a contrast. But it shouldn't be a surprise, of course, because in the Old Testament, in the Law, in the Prophets, in the Psalms, God had promised exactly that.

You remember when he spoke to Moses and he said in Exodus chapter 6, I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

I will deliver you from slavery. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm. I will take you to be my people and I will be your God. I will bring you into the land that I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord. You see, God had promised that he would redeem for himself a people who, like David, would have him as their God and who would be a people for him.

[11 : 51] God promised that he would give them a land, a wonderful rich land of promise flowing with milk and honey. And he promised that in that land they would know his presence, his dwelling among them in the tabernacle and later the temple.

And he promised that they would know his blessing upon them, granting them long life and length of days. So David here experiences the blessings of that covenant relationship.

Knowing the one true God, being included in his people, living in the land of promise, knowing the presence of God and the blessing of God upon him. What could I possibly get, he says, by turning away from this wonderful God who has cared for my past, my present, my future, in whom I find refuge, in whom I cannot be shaken, in whom my life is secure, with whom I have fullness of joy. Why would I trade that, he says, for sorrow? Well, David warns against running after other gods. And Jesus warned his followers against running after not so much other gods, but running after other things.

In the Sermon of the Mount, he spoke a lot about worry, about anxiety. And he commanded his disciples to take refuge in God when they faced anxiety.

[13 : 24] And he gives the example of people who are worried about food and about clothing, who are preoccupied with the material things of life.

And he says in chapter 6 of Matthew's Gospel, verse 32, the Gentiles seek after all these things. And your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. David looked to the one true God and God looked after David.

Jesus says to his followers, seek first God's kingdom and God will seek for you the things you need. Is that an easy thing to do?

I don't find it very easy to do. Do we turn to God in times of difficulty? Do we seek our refuge and our security and our hope in him? Or do we turn away, running after other things, running after other gods when things get tough?

[14 : 36] What about when the money is running low? How do we deal with financial need? Do we get down on our knees and do we pray to the God who rules heaven and earth, to whom the cattle on a thousand hills belong?

Do we turn to his people and seek their mercy and their provision? Or do we forget God and turn to the bookies and the loan sharks, only too keen to lend to those in need?

What do we do when we're feeling low emotionally? Do we cease our devotion? Do we cease to read the scripture? Do we cease to join in the fellowship of the saints?

Do we instead run after the bottle or the pills that we think will numb our pain and lift our mood?

What do we do when we're facing grief? Do we turn from the God who gives endurance and encouragement, the God of all comfort who will one day stoop down to wipe the tears from our

eyes?

Do we give up hope and fall as so many do into despair? Where do we seek our refuge when life gets tough?

[15 : 50] Is it in the Lord, our heavenly Father? Or is it in other gods and a preoccupation with other things? Well, David knew that Yahweh, the covenant God, was faithful.

Faithful to his promises, faithful to his people, faithful in life. That is why he made him his refuge. But David knew something else.

And he knew that God was faithful, not just in life, but through death. And in verse 9 to 11, he makes this point.

You see, it's a terrible thing, death. It just ruins everything. It ruins our plans, it ruins our relationship, it ruins our purposes, it just ruins everything.

And one man who learned the finality of death was a chap called Bolt, with a D. He was an American who owned a lot of hotels in the 19th century.

[16 : 54] And at the very height of his fame and his wealth and his power, he decided to build a castle for his wife. So he bought an island in Thousand Island. That's the place where they make that lovely sauce that you might get with your prawn cocktail.

Thousand Island, it's in Canada. And he bought an island, he called it Heart Island. And he designed this wonderful castle. Six stories, 120 rooms, 365 windows, a swimming pool, a boathouse, all sorts of luxury.

And it was to be a Valentine's Day present to his wife. Far grander than any present I'm afraid I've ever given on Valentine's Day.

And it was going very well. He had 300 stonemasons and builders employed. And things were approaching completion when in January his wife fell ill and some days later she died.

And Mr. Bolt never returned to Thousand Island. He abandoned the construction of the castle. His promises, purposes and plans lay in ruins. Death ruins everything.

[18 : 02] But David says in verse 9, God's purposes and God's promises and God's plans cannot be stopped even by death. My flesh dwells secure for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your Holy One see corruption, see decay.

You made known to me the paths of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. You see, commentators, some of the commentators I was reading this week kind of find these verses a little bit hard to digest.

And they read it and what they say is of course what David is speaking about here is not so much life after death but just, you know, God preserving his life. God sort of keeping him from danger and saving him.

There's maybe a little bit of that if you look across the page to Psalm 18 verse 16. We have these words of David. God sent from on high, he takes him, he draws him from many waters, he rescues him from the strong enemy.

Verse 19, he brings him into a broad place. God rescues him because he delights in him. So David knew that God is able to sustain life and preserve life and deliver from harm.

[19 : 19] But as we look at the words, it does seem, doesn't it, to be a little bit more than that. My flesh dwells secure, you will not abandon me to death, I will not decay in your presence fullness of joy, pleasure forevermore.

It almost sounds, doesn't it, a little bit like eternal life. Life lived in the presence of God. No more sin, no more pain, no more dying. And in fact, as we read the book of Psalms, we find verses like that popping up in different places.

Just look at Psalm 17 verse 15. David says, As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness. When I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

Or what about Psalm 73, where he says to God, You guide me with your counsel and afterward you will receive me to glory. What about Elijah being taken up to heaven in a chariot?

What about Daniel being told that he will sleep and awake to resurrection life? Christ brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

[20 : 29] But as we read the Old Testament, there are glimpses and shafts of light breaking through that seem to tell us the Old Testament believers had that same hope.

Their trust was in the God who gives life to the dead and they shared in that hope of resurrection. So David seems to have some concept that he will go and be with God after his death.

But what does the New Testament do with this passage? What does Peter do? What does Paul do in their sermon? And what they seem to do is apply it not to David himself but to one of his heirs, one of his descendants.

There's been a lot of talk of heirs this week. Prince Charles became the longest serving heir in British history, 59 years, waiting to ascend to the throne. Of course, Prince William and Kate getting married on Friday and already the papers are speculating when they will have an heir, someone to continue the royal line.

Well, the Bible is very interested in David's heirs. In fact, in one heir in particular. You see, God had promised David, he'd made another covenant with him.

[21 : 51] And in 2 Samuel 7, he said to David that I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

The throne of David was to be an eternal throne. There was to be a king who would sit upon the throne and reign forever. God had promised that David would have an heir.

And if you have your Bibles, if you could turn with me to Acts chapter 2, we'll see how Peter develops this theme. Acts chapter 2 verse 29.

From verse 25 to verse 28, he quotes from Psalm 16, the closing verses of the psalm. And then in verse 29 he says this, Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day.

Being therefore a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh seek eruption.

[23 : 25] This Jesus God raised up and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

God made a promise to David. He swore with an oath to David that one of his descendants would reign forever and we would know which descendant this was, verse 31, because he would not be abandoned to Hades nor would his flesh see corruption.

He would die and he would be raised from the dead. Peter says, let all Israel know, verse 36, that God has made him, that is Jesus both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

God made a promise. He had a purpose and a plan and death itself at an interval of a millennium could not stop the Lord fulfilling that promise.

To take a descendant of David, to bring him through death, to raise him to new life and to make him both Lord and Christ. David knew the covenant God was faithful in death and he knew that the covenant God was faithful through death.

[25 : 04] But what does this resurrection mean? Peter witnessed to it and he goes on to explain that God has made another promise. verse 33, we've read it, Jesus has received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit.

He has poured out this that you are seeing and hearing. And when the crowd ask him how they are to respond to this wonderful news of the resurrection, he says in verse 38, repent, turn from your sin and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

for the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

God made a promise to Moses that he would bring the people into the land and dwell in their presence. He made a promise to David that he would raise one of his descendants from the dead and through Christ he makes a promise that everyone who turns from their sin and believes in the name of Christ will know the forgiveness of their sins and new life in the Holy Spirit.

God is faithful in life. He is faithful through death. So as we gather today this Easter Sunday to think and to rejoice and to celebrate the resurrection let us remind ourselves that God is a faithful God that this Jesus whom he sent who he has made both Lord and Christ is able to save to the uttermost.

[26 : 51] You see the Bible portrays a realistic view of mankind apart from God. It shows us a man alienated from his creator not under his blessing as David was but under his curse.

It shows mankind subject to the influence of Satan to the forces of darkness. It shows mankind in bondage to sin. It shows mankind living in the shadow of death.

And yet Christ when he came and through his death and through his resurrection rescues us from all of this. As Peter says he offers the forgiveness of sins.

He bears upon himself the sins of his people. We're told in Hebrews that he destroyed the one who has the power of death and who holds all people in lifelong slavery through fear of death.

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. And we are promised that those who put their trust in him will share in a resurrection like his.

[27 : 59] Once we were alienated from God but now through his death and resurrection we can be reconciled to God. Once enemies now friends and more than friends beloved children.

God is faithful to his word and his promise. Well it's wonderful news isn't it?

Wonderful hope wonderful refuge for us in a difficult world and in uncertain times. God can be trusted. He gives an inheritance to his people his word is sure.

And Peter as he writes to his believers in his first letter thanks God because of the resurrection.

According to the Lord's great mercy he has caused us to be born again through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead to an inheritance imperishable undefiled unfading kept in heaven for you.

David rejoiced that his inheritance was secure because God held his lot. And Peter says if you're a Christian your inheritance is even more secure.

[29 : 15] It is kept in heaven for you. It will never perish. It cannot be stolen. It will never fade.

David rejoiced that God kept his promises but he swore an oath and he fulfilled it.

Peter reminds his believers that we have been born again through the living and abiding word of God. All flesh is like grass all its glory like the flower of grass the grass withers and the flower falls but the word of the Lord remains forever.

If like David we have refuge in this God who sent his Christ to break the forces of sin and death and hell and to rescue people into relationship with the living God then we can say with David my heart is glad my whole being rejoices you have made known to me the path of life in your presence there is fullness of joy at your right hands are pleasures forevermore.

so let me ask you friend where do you stand with this God? Do you hear this word which endures forever?

Where do you stand in relation to his promise? Have you claimed that promise for yourself? The promise of sins forgiven of new life in the power of God's Holy Spirit? Do you have a share in that inheritance?

[30 : 49] Have you sought your refuge in him who offers you something imperishable something which will never fade? Are you looking forward to fullness of joy in the presence of God?

Are you anticipating those pleasures at God's right hand forevermore? Or like the idolater of chapter verse 4 will your sorrows increase as health and money disappoint and fail you?

Preserve me O God for in you I take refuge. Let me ask you friend where is your refuge? Will you be shaken? Are you secure? Do you have in the Lord a beautiful inheritance?

God can be trusted his word is sure his promise will be fulfilled he is faithful in life and he will be faithful through death.

Let's pray. Father we thank you that in these uncertain and difficult times we have an anchor for the soul.

[32 : 06] We thank you Lord that every promise of yours is yes in Christ that none of the words the oath you have made have fallen to the ground. We thank you that you promise us in Christ the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of your Holy Spirit the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.

And we pray Lord that as we go from this place into this week that we will seek in you our refuge that we will seek first your kingdom and all these other things will be added to us.

We pray Lord that like David we might prove your faithfulness that we might have that wonderful hope knowing that you are the God who provides who guides who blesses who guides us with your counsel and who afterward will receive us into glory.

So we thank you for your wonderful love and mercy all the more so on this Easter Sunday and we give you thanks in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.