**By Faith, Because He Promised**

Based on [Ezekiel 34:11-24](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Eze34.11-24)

Preached on September 11, 2016

Pentecost 17, Proper 19

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

The OT Lesson from Ezekiel was recorded almost 600 years before Christ. It is a prophecy of his coming as judge and shepherd of his people. In this prophecy Christ is called the Lord’s servant “David.” **David, as a shepherd boy slew lions and a bears to protect his flock, and was anointed by God king and ruler of His people.** And as a man he ruled Israel with a Godly heart, and you can read what His heart says in the Psalms. The Christ to come is called here “David” because, when he comes he will be anointed, Chosen by God just such a shepherd and he will be just such a king.

The Lord says, “**I will set up over [the sheep] one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken**.” There are a number of promises God makes to his people in the OT lesson. But the one that covers them all is this. “I will rescue them...and bring them to their own land.” To rescue and to bring to their own land…that means to save.

To speak as generally as possible, salvation is to be taken from a dangerous place to a safe place. And God’s promise of salvation is that he will someday take you from this world, this valley of sorrows, to be with him in heaven; and to wait there with him, in safety until the final deliverance, when he will put your soul back in your raised new and incorruptible body, wipe away the valley of sorrow and place you in the new creation…the new heavens and the new earth. Salvation is not a tax break, or finding the perfect job; salvation is not found in this world. Salvation is when all your enemies are destroyed by God your king; and you live willingly under his reign forever. And that salvation is yours now, not in that no one can harm your body; *but because you have faith*, believe in the promises of God, you cannot lose your soul. So you can say, even in this world, ***I am*** saved by faith.

How people were saved before Christ came? Again, by faith. There is a false teaching in Christendom, that before Jesus came God’s people were saved by keeping God’s law, and that it was only *after* Jesus came to die on the cross that people were saved by faith. Satan never runs out of ways to twist the scripture into knots to confuse people. Obedience to the Law cannot, nor ever could save a creation lost in sin. **Ever since the beginning, and Adam and Eve’s fall into sin and death and damnation, *they were saved* from these enemies by faith…and faith in Christ.** They didn’t necessarily know who this Christ would be, when he would be born, that he would be born of a virgin, suffer under Pontius Pilate, be crucified, dead and buried and on the third day rise again. They didn’t know all the details, but they were saved by faith in the Christ, which simply means the messiah.

How is it they knew, thousands of years ahead of time, that God would send a Christ? Because He promised. Because--from the very moment sin opened their eyes and they knew they were naked and hid from God--God found them and made a promise to them in Genesis 3:15. Immediately, God curses the serpent Satan and says, “**I will make you and the woman enemies; your children and her children. Her *child* shall crush your head, and you will bruise his heel.”** God promised to send someone--a child of the woman--to destroy the devil, and that in destroying the devil this Christ too would be bruised. So it was promised by God to Adam, that that the messiah would destroy the tempter’s power and undo his hold on them…**and that he would accomplish this through his own suffering and death.**

Genesis 3:15 is the first promise of salvation in the bible. And it’s a promise that is not based on the Law; it does not say that Adam and Eve will overcome the devil themselves by their works and obedience. **The promise is that God will “anoint”—(that means “choose”, that means “messiah”, which means “Christ”)--God will “*anoint”* someone born of a woman to crush the devil.** God will do it. Adam and Eve will not have to save themselves; they will have to *be* saved. And they are saved by the Christ even before he comes, by faith in God’s promise of him.

And so by believing God’s promise; Adam and Eve were “justified.” **The promised Child of Eve is the Child of Mary, the son of David, the Messiah, the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God.**  And in *due time* this promised Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of a virgin, anointed in his baptism by John to be that Christ. And, in *due time* Satan entered Judas Iscariot, just as he had entered the serpent in the beginning. And Judas sold Jesus down the river to the cross for thirty pieces of silver. And in *due time*, on the cross the devil had his day, and “bruised the heel of Eve’s child” by inciting sinful men to nail him to the cross; but that cross, the Christ paid for our sins thus disarming the devil’s power. That bruised child of Eve, crushed Satan’s power.

How were people saved before Jesus? By **believing the promise of *the Christ to come***. How are people saved now, by **believing *the promise of the Christ that came***, and who will come again. By grace you are saved through faith, and this is not your own doing but is—(and always was)--a gift from God. That’s why salvation is called an inheritance; an inheritance is something you didn’t earn; it something somebody else earned and then gave to you, and even though you didn’t earn it, it’s all yours.

Thousands of years after Adam and Eve, Ezekiel spoke another promise from God to his people, and it’s in our lesson today. “**I will set up over [the sheep] one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken.**” This wasn’t the first promise since the garden fall, but with each promise in the OT, the faithful people--who would hold to God’s Word and promise--got a clearer and clearer picture of just what this Christ will be like. **God *promises* the Christ will shepherd his scattered people.** He *promises* to search them out. He *promises* to rescue them. He *promises* to feed them. It’s like a camera lens is slowly coming into focus over the OT.

He also *promises* to judge and to destroy their enemies the false shepherds and fat sheep that abuse them. The sheep who push with side and shoulder, and thrust all the weak with their horns. **Who hoard the good pasture, and muddy the clear water as they drink of it.** Yes God has human enemies. Yes Satan has children of his own. **And when the Son of Man comes on clouds of glory to judge the living and the dead, he will cast them into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels.** He will feed *them*…not “salvation”, but “justice.” This is God’s Word, and it is most certainly true.

Without a promise from God, there can be no faith. And without faith, there can be no salvation. So, little flock, hear God’s promises and hold on to them. Repeat them when you rise in the morning and go to bed at night. They are tidily packaged in the apostle’s creed; though not in the shadows; not in the definite, yet blurry pictures we hear from prophets like Ezekiel; that somehow, sometime, God will seek and rescue and deliver. But the definite clear picture promise of salvation, thatHhe has sought rescued delivered and accomplished salvation for us in the person and works, the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Look in the OT how many promises God gives his people. “I will search, I will seek, I will rescue, I will feed, I will be their shepherd.” What ridiculous creatures we are to have such assurances from God our Shepherd, and yet fear, and doubt, and disobey. Faith says, “**The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want**”…of anything.

Why do God’s sheep still fear, and doubt God and fail to trust him? Perhaps it is because there are so many false shepherds around us, who promise much and do little. Donald Trump is going to build a wall to solve all immigration problems; Hillary’s going to deliver the US to the promised land of Universal Health Care. Why do we doubt? Because again and again we put out trust in fallible and flawed human beings whom make their own promises of personal salvation for you, and they never deliver. Psalm 146:3…//“**Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save**.” Human beings who promise salvation are fools. And who’s the bigger fool; the fool, or the fool who believes him?

The human heart is an idol factory. It’s always finding something new and close and attractive to put its trust in and to solve its troubles. A new leader, a new king, a new pastor, a new savior, a new Christ. **If the covetous human heart would only realize that God is closer to you than you are to yourself**. He *promised* to send you one shepherd, his servant David to feed you, to rescue you, to avenge your enemies, to deliver you to green pastures.

Human leaders can come and go, some of them faithful, some unfaithful, all flawed, but God makes this promise, he is your one Good shepherd, and he never fails to seek out and save the lost. **And when he finds them, He picks them up puts them on his shoulder and rejoices.** He rejoices over one sinner who repents, over ninety-nine nice looking hypocrites who have no use for Him.

There are so many promises God makes in the lesson today, that I am ashamed how we treat them, **like campaign promises that we’re too cynical to believe, that roll in and out of our ears like water off a duck’s back.** Little flock remember, when you have a promise from God, remember what it is you’re really dealing with. It’s the most sure and certain thing in the world and for two reasons, (1) God cannot lie, and (2) God cannot fail.

I promised I would preach to you this morning, and as it turns out I was able to keep it. **The best I can do when I give someone my word is make sure that when I do, I do everything *in my power* to keep it.** You know there are some people who if they don’t show, you’re not surprised because they often make promises they don’t keep. Others you know that if they don’t show, you actually worry about them because they must, be sick or dead. I can promise to be here, and do everything in my power to keep it…but my power is limited. I can fail.

I can promise to preach to you today, and yet, through no fault of my own, get hit by a drunk driver, or get a flat tire, or have a heart attack and not make it to the pulpit in time. **Now I know if that happened you wouldn’t hold it against me, but nevertheless I broke my promise**. Or to put it a better way, my Word failed. I said I would be somewhere and I wasn’t there…the rest is details. That’s why we need insurance policies, because nothing is certain with sinful men. That’s also why insurance companies call hurricanes, and floods, and tornadoes “acts of God,” because He’s the only one who could’ve prevent them.

The most reliable human being in the world can promise you something, but it’s still not certain, because all men are sinful and all men can fail. But God cannot fail**. My Word can fail; but God’s Word cannot fail.** And so when He makes a promise, you don’t have to take out an insurance policy; you don’t have to hedge your bets. You can take it to Vegas and go all in because when God’s Word cannot fail. It will always, always, always, accomplish the purpose for which He sent it.

And that’s why if your child dies prematurely, or if you lose your job and can’t support your family the way you used to, or if someone abuses you and takes advantage of you, that has no effect on faith. Because faith does not concern itself where there is no promise from God, and God never promised healthy children, or job security, or personal safety. **Praise Him…because he gives us these things more often than not…but we don’t have any promise for this world except that it is destined for destruction and so we’re fools if we put our hope in it.** Fools who build their house on the sand. But God does have a promise of an eternal home, waiting for you beyond this valley of sorrows that is your inheritance through Christ who baptized you and won the victory so that you can call his father, your Father.

Every time you hear the scriptures, listen for these gold nuggets these promises where God says, “I will”. I will search, I will rescue, I will bring you out…I will judge your oppressors, I will bind up the injured. **Each one of them more certain than the sunrise tomorrow, (which by the way you have no guarantee of).** But Eternal salvation and security for God’s sheep???…that’s a done deal! It was as good as done when he promised it; and now that he has done it, it is finished.