

**Isaiah 40:1-11 + The King Comes to Keep His Promises + Series: Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel  
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY  
2nd Sunday of Advent + 10 December 2017**

We hear a lot of promises this time of year. Commercials promise that if you buy this toy or that gaming system or see this movie or make a particular treat, your kids will think you're cool and your family will love you even more this Christmas. Others promise that if you buy their brand of jewelry or automobile or gadget your loved one will think this is the best Christmas ever. Parents make promises to their kids and vice versa. Loved ones make promises to each another, and New Year's resolutions are made.

Yet we were to leap ahead to the end of January or this time next year and look back all those promises, what would we find? Sadly, we'd probably find a path of broken promises behind and around us. Toys break. Gaming systems get fought over. Movies disappoint. The new gadget sheen or new car smell disappears and newer products become available. New Year's resolutions get tossed with the leftovers, and we all break promises to our loved ones.

You'd like to think you've gotten used to all the broken promises, but it still hurts, doesn't it? It still hurts when people don't come through for you, when an exciting product fails, or when you yourself fail to keep a promise to someone you love. Broken promises only make you more skeptical or cynical about any promise that someone makes.

Unfortunately that skepticism can even impact how you view God. After all, he's made more promises to us and others than we can count. Did he keep them? Did he come through for you? Or was he like every one of us who break more promises than we possibly care to admit? This morning the Old Testament prophet Isaiah presents us with four examples that prove that **THE KING COMES TO KEEP HIS PROMISES**.

The ancient prophet rolls out exhibit #1. You see a suffering people. They have lost everything, including loved ones and property. A heavy burden of guilt crushes them with judgment, but suddenly they perk up. Their eyes lift heavenward, and the burden disappears from their shoulders as it is placed on the almighty shoulders of a crucified King. ***"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."***

Why does God feel the need speak a promise of tender comfort to his people? What had they done? They had rejected their God. This God had cared for them since the days of their forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This God had grown them into a great nation, and then with mighty wonders freed them from slavery in the kingdom of Egypt. With greater miracles, this God had brought them through forty years in the wilderness to the Promised Land and had given that bountiful land to them, but how did they respond? They rejected him.

They chased after the local fertility gods and the pagan gods of other nations. They gave God lip service while giving their hearts to the almighty shekel. They made promises to faithfully follow him, but broke every one of them. They rejected their God until finally after 700 years, the Lord destroyed most of their nation and scattered it into exile. Later God would destroy the rest of their nation and send them off into exile. Judgment would come because they rejected the true God, but tender comfort was coming because God still loved them.

***"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem...that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."*** God's fulfillment of that promise was 700 years in the making. God gave double the grace, double the forgiveness as he punished his own Son as the sacrifice for all of their sins and all of yours too.

You see, you and I need that promise of tender comfort. We may not bow down to pagan gods, but by nature, we are sinful and unclean. By nature, we are hostile to God because ***"the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."*** (Romans 8:7) By nature, we reject our God and his will. Sin taints every action we do, every word we speak, and every thought we think. God lavishes us with his grace—giving us everything we need and more for this life and the next, yet we still chase after the blind cravings of our sinful natures. We daily break our promises to remain faithful to God, and only by his grace are we not swept away in death.

Here in this exhibit, we see ourselves beneath that crushing burden of guilt. We see the heavy chains of our sins of weakness and sins of intent, but we also see the fulfillment of that promise of tender comfort. We see God pay for all of our sins by punishing his beloved Son on a cross. We see the comfort of God's forgiveness pour forth from the bleeding body of our crucified King, who came to keep his promises.

Now the ancient prophet rolls out exhibit #2. You see footage of a strange-looking prophet crying out with urgency. ***“Prepare...the way for the LORD!”*** He calls for complete change and points to the growing light of ***“the glory of the LORD”*** on the horizon. You can’t get his voice out of your head. ***“In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”***

Why the call to prepare? Why the great construction and demolition project that clears the way? The prophet calls for permanent, life-changing preparation, but why? ***“The glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it.”*** This is preparation we dare not treat lightly.

By revealing his glory, the Lord reveals his holy grace to the entire world—the good news of God’s undeserved love in Jesus that brings forgiveness and life to those who repent and believe, but also ruin and destruction to those who reject it.

Have you heeded this call to prepare or have you allowed your life to become an impassable mess of self-built obstacles in the Savior’s way? Are concerns about the things of this world or the distractions of the season keeping you from being truly prepared for the coming glory of your King, who comes to reveal his holy grace to you?

This Advent we need to spend time preparing in repentance. We need to do it, because King Jesus kept that promise. He revealed the glory of the Lord of grace. He still keeps his promise so that ***“all mankind together will see”*** his glorious grace through his gospel. The growing light of the glory of the Lord is coming, so we prepare in repentance confessing our sins and trusting God’s forgiveness in Christ.

The ancient prophet now rolls out Exhibit #3, and it’s the hardest one to hear. It is a recording of a conversation between God and his prophet. What God has to say brings the cold chill of fear into our hearts. You see, the Lord speaks of the temporary nature of our lives. ***“A voice says, ‘Cry out.’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.”***

The all-knowing God cuts to the heart of why we cannot keep our promises. None of us can be sure that what we promise today will be kept tomorrow. To be honest, none of us knows if tomorrow will even come. By nature, none of us has any more immortality than the cut flowers laid on a grave, because over us all hangs this sentence: ***“The wages of sin is death...”*** (Romans 6:23a)

***“...But the word of our God stands forever.”*** Standing o’er the wrecks of time is the sure and certain promise of the grace of ***“our God.”*** Yes, the grass withers and the flowers fall, but God’s grace never ends. The forgiveness he has for his sinful people never ends. The glorious holiness he reveals for his people never ends. The life he earned by allowing his life to be ended never ends. When you stand by another deathbed or another casket or another grave, and you can’t escape the reminder that someday death will claim you too, only ***“the word of our God”*** lifts your eyes to see the King who keeps his promise of eternal salvation.

The ancient prophet has one more exhibit for you, if you’re not convinced that your King always keeps his promises. This is the happiest exhibit of all. It’s all shouting and cheering and good news. It’s a victory parade for the King of kings, yet it’s pure comfort as a Good Shepherd wraps up another hurting sheep in his loving arms. ***“You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, ‘Here is your God! See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.”***

Here you see God’s promise of victorious care. The King of kings comes in victory to gather his people, including you, to be with him forever. He has won this victory for you, and he cares for you with tender love. See, then, all the promises fulfilled in this final exhibit. See the comfort of God’s forgiveness. See the revelation of God’s glorious grace. See the blessing of God’s eternal salvation. See the loving care of your victorious Shepherd, and finally there in the almighty arms of your coming Savior, see yourself. Amen.