

## Easter 2015

In the Disney animated feature film *Tangled*, the heroine – Rapunzel – is trying to broker a deal with the dashing thief Flynn Rider. Having hidden his latest conquest – a princess’ tiara – she uses it as leverage: guide her on her journey and she will then return the stolen treasure. When Flynn eyes her suspiciously, she answers his skepticism, insisting “I promise. And when I promise something, I never ever break that promise. Never.”

Would that such were true of real people! Consider, for example, a much maligned category of persons – the politician. Recently, politicians have started announcing their 2016 Presidential candidacy, and over the next several months they will make many promises. But how many past Presidents have made and broken promises. Woodrow Wilson campaigned for re-election in 1916 with the slogan “He kept us out of war;” but in April the following year, Wilson asked a joint session of Congress to declare war against Germany. Promise made, promise broken. In 1988, George H.W. Bush famously pledged, “Read my lips...no new taxes;” but in 1990, while there were no new taxes per se, several existing taxes were raised despite a promise not to do that either. Promise made, promise broken.

Of course, sometimes the most honest, faithful man or woman has every intention of keeping his promise no matter what: but they break their promise when some immense, immovable, impregnable obstacle stands in their way. One such obstacle is death. Watch a television show or read a book and hear a character promise “I’ll be right back,” or “I’ll always be right here,” but then death lays hold on him and he isn’t right back, he isn’t still right there – this powerful adversary kept him from keeping word.

But 2,000 years ago God kept his promise, overwhelming the greedy grave; and God’s faithfulness is such that death, despite all his pomp and power, could not keep him from keeping his word. In Acts 2, the apostle Peter preached about Jesus Christ, how he had been crucified, and then says: “But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him (i.e. Christ) to be held by it;” and why? Our text continues as Peter quotes Psalm 16: “FOR,” For – the apostle is explaining how potent death was rendered impotent on Easter Sunday, how his strong bands snapped, how his clutches were promptly pried open, one reason why it was impossible that our Lord Jesus Christ should stay dead and buried. “For David says concerning him,” and King David wrote this prophecy under inspiration of the Holy Spirit – he was only saying what God was saying – David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. ***For thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption.***” Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades nor let thy Holy One see corruption. And lest anyone not understand what David means, he explains in verse 31, “he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.” In other words, Jesus died, but God said he wouldn’t stay dead and he wouldn’t see decay.

This prophetic statement from Psalm 16 is not an isolated incident. God elsewhere in Scripture affirms his promise that his beloved and only begotten Son Jesus Christ would be raised from the dead. In Isaiah 53, a prophecy about that foretold our Lord’s passion, as God laid on him the iniquity of us all, we read in verses 9 and 10: “He had done no wrong, and he never deceived anyone. **But he was buried** like a criminal; he was put in a rich man’s grave. But it was the LORD’s good plan to crush him and fill him with grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have a multitude of children, many heirs. **He will enjoy a long life**, and the LORD’s plan will prosper in his hands.” (Isaiah 53:9-10) Notice in

verse 9 he was buried, and in verse 10 he will enjoy a long life. How could both statements be true unless he who was buried was also raised from the dead? Another promise comes from the story of Jonah, the prophet who spent three days and nights in the belly of a great fish; and our Lord explains how that Old Testament episode points to his resurrection: “For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so I, the Son of Man, will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.” (**Matthew 12:38**) In short, as the apostle Paul writes, referencing the Old Testament, “He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said.” (**1 Corinthians 15:4**)

So God promised his Son would be raised from the dead, and three days after our Lord suffered and died on Calvary’s Cross, he kept his promise and raised his Son from the dead. Praise God for his fidelity to his promises. “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (**Numbers 23:19**) “The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.” (**Psalms 145:13**)

We could go through Scripture and see promise after promise our God of steadfast faithfulness has made and kept: his promise to never again destroy the world with a flood, a promise which we see reaffirmed in every rainbow; his promise that Abraham – though he was as good as dead and his wife was aged and barren – would have a son; his promise that the children of Israel would inherit the Promised Land of Canaan, disposing nations more and mightier than they. Or what about the promises concerning Christ: that the seed of Eve would crush the head of that ancient serpent, Satan; that the virgin would conceive and give birth to a son and call his name Immanuel; that he would be crushed for our iniquities and wounded for our transgressions, dying for our sins – the promise we just looked at of our Lord’s glorious resurrection. But this Easter Sunday, I just want to give you two promises to consider.

### **1. Death’s Death**

The great 17<sup>th</sup> century poet John Donne wrote, “Death be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful;” and we think, “Well it is! It is mighty and dreadful!” Who can stay his hand, or who can escape his clutches? The rich cannot bribe him, the poor cannot beg him, the wise cannot reason with him, the valiant cannot defeat him, and the coward cannot run away from him, the powerful cannot entice him. Yes, there are some who resist him longer than others. My dad recently heard in the news about a 104 year old woman who drinks three cans of Doctor Pepper daily; she added, “My doctors keep telling me to stop, it’s not healthy; but they keep dying and I keep living.” Another lady was so successful that she outlived all her contemporaries, and when the news interviewed her and asked, “What’s the easiest thing about being so old,” she answered “There’s no peer pressure.” But all the healthy diets, physical exercise, sugar-riddled Doctor Peppers in the world can’t stave off death, so as the Scriptures say, “And it is appointed unto men once to die.” (**Hebrews 9:27**)

However, Christ triumphed o’er the grave, he stripped death of its victory and sting; and death need not be dreadful to us who are in Christ, because we know a few facts. First, we know that Christ’s resurrection guarantees our own resurrection: “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits (which were a pledge or down payment...the firstfruits) of those who have fallen asleep.” (**1 Corinthians 15:20**) In other words, the resurrection of Christ guarantees our own resurrection; and we have confidence that when he descends with a shout, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, the dead in Christ will be raised and, per the apostle Paul, “He (Jesus) will take these weak mortal bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same mighty power he will use to conquer everything, everywhere.” (**Philippians 3:21**)

Second, we know that death will be destroyed in the end. “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (**1 Corinthians 15:26**) Thus it is that in Revelation 21, when we see the new heaven and the new earth and the new Jerusalem, the holy city in which God will be with us and we will be with God forever and ever, death is notably absent: “There will be no more death.”

So here’s a promise from God that should comfort all of us: death will die.

## **2. Those Who Believe Will Be Saved**

For some this morning, you’re here because you’re searching: searching for meaning in your life, searching for answers to the questions that keep you awake at night, searching for God, searching for a relationship with him, searching for a second chance and a new start. Others of you have gone through the motions your whole lives - but there’s no reality behind the façade, and you still have an aching emptiness, that gnawing vacancy in your heart that nothing you’ve tried can fill. Others here this morning may know exactly how sin-stained and wretched they are in God’s eyes, and they are hoping against all hope that perhaps God can forgive them and make them into brand new people. And for all such as these, here’s another wonderful promise of God: those who believe in his risen Son will be saved. “For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (**Roman 10:9**) If you confess Jesus Christ as your personal Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead just like he said he would, it doesn’t say you could be saved, you might be saved - you will be saved.” Today, even this very hour, can be the day in which you are forgiven all your sins, reconciled to God as his friend, adopted by God and born again and from above as his beloved child, redeemed from slavery to sin and the fear of death, recreated - made a new creature in Christ: the old has gone, the new has come. If you’re thinking, “I’m too vile, I’m too wretched - I’m stained through and through with sin, and I’m guilty of so many things;” we read, “...for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord’ everyone - no matter who you are, no matter what you’ve done, no matter your faults, flaws, failures - everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ “will be saved.” (**Romans 10:13**) Not only does this promise give assurance to those who are saved but need assurance - this promise should encourage those who have never yet believed on the Lord Jesus Christ to confess him as their personal Lord and risen Savior. I encourage anyone here this morning who has never yet believed: this Easter Day in which we celebrate our Lord’s resurrection can also be also be a day of rejoicing in heaven as you are raised to a new life in Christ. Would you bow with me in prayer: If you want this day to receive the new life and forgiveness available in Christ Jesus alone, I invite you to repeat this prayer silently as I pray aloud: “Lord Jesus...I am a sinner...and I need a Savior. Save me. I believe you died for my sins...I believe that God raised you from the dead...and I ask you to come into my heart...and reign in my life as my personal Lord. In your name...Amen.” And for all of us here this morning, let us close this message in prayer: “O Father: great is your faithfulness. While men may break their word, you always keep your word. We praise you for your faithfulness displayed 2,000 years ago on the first Easter Sunday when you did not abandon your Holy One, the Lord Jesus Christ, to the grave, but raised him from the dead. We thank you that because Christ was raised, we in Christ have victory over death and the grave and the hope of our own resurrection. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.”