

Isaiah 45:23-25

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: 01 December 2013

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] This morning, we consider a promise for today, or one that I'm sure is immediate, will go and be saved. And that promise has been fulfilled today. There have been those who today have been able to experience for themselves that this promise is one that is trustworthy. Indeed, in what remains of today, I have no doubt that this promise will be proved true and reliable and trustworthy. Again, for those of you who were here this morning, and forgive me if you weren't able to be, and this isn't so familiar what I'm saying, but for those of you who were, we can, with our Crofter friend from Lewis, express our desire that more and more people would turn to the Lord.

But we know that the reality is that many don't. The command is there. It is announced. It is directed to all, to the ends of the earth, but many choose not to obey the command. Indeed, most choose not to obey this command. Most of our fellow citizens in our city here in Aberdeen live in conscious or unconscious rebellion against God. Perhaps most unconsciously rebelling against God.

Very few bow down before Him or confess His name. Now, will it be always so? And the answer that we can give to that question is a resounding no, because in this passage, there is another promise, and there is a promise that is also a promise for today in the sense that it is a promise that brings encouragement to God's people, but it is one that anticipates future fulfillment, unlike the one we were thinking about this morning, turn to me and be saved, one that has been and will be fulfilled even today.

Today, this other declaration of God concerns something that we'll know of future fulfillment. It's a promise for today that we can profit from considering and celebrating, but its fulfillment is a future one. And I refer to the words of verse 23 in the second part of the verse in Isaiah 45.

Before me, declares God, before me, every knee will bow. By me, every tongue will swear.

[2 : 5 9] Now, these words, this affirmation or promise, if you will, is familiar to many of us, principally because of the manner in which Paul quotes these words in his writings on two occasions.

On the first occasion, he does so explicitly. He identifies what he says as being Scripture. And then on the second occasion, the one that we've read in Philippians, he does so less explicitly and rather more loosely in terms of the use that he makes of these words. But I think we can confidently say that these are the words that are in his mind as he writes the words that we've read in Philippians 2. The first occasion, I should say, is in Romans 14. Now, we'll return to both of these references presently. But what can we say about this promise? Let's call it a promise. Before me, every knee will bow. By me, every tongue will swear. What can we say? Well, there's a few things we can say about it. And I'll mention what they are, or certainly the things that I want to say about it.

And then having mentioned what we'll be laying out, we can then do so one by one. First of all, we'll notice how this is a certain promise. But also, as I've already said, but we'll just dwell on this a little bit more, it's a yet-to-be-fulfilled promise, unlike the one that we were thinking of this morning. The other thing that we can say about it is that it is a revealing promise. And when I talk about that, I'll be explaining how it is revealing very particularly concerning the identity of Jesus. It reveals to us something very important about who Jesus is. It's also a universal promise. The language is universal language. Before me, every knee will bow. Before me, or by me, every tongue will swear. And that in itself, its universality makes it what we might call an intriguing promise, or a difficult promise, as we try and work out, well, how can that be?

So, let's think about these things. But before we do, let's just dwell for a brief moment on the promise itself. What is the promise? Well, we've read it, and it is what it is. We don't need to dwell on this overly long, but I think there is merit in casting some light on the meaning of what is being said here in our text in Isaiah by considering the manner in which Paul uses and applies these same words. For one thing, as we look to Paul's use of these words or of this language, I think it will help us better understand the meaning of the second part that isn't so clear, it seems to me, at first glance.

Before me, every knee will bow. We can visualize that. It's not difficult, the language. But then, by me, every tongue will swear. That perhaps is a little bit more difficult to understand what is meant by that. What does that mean? By me, every tongue will swear. Well, as we look to Paul's use of this language, I think that will help to clarify what the promise is, what it is that is being said by the prophet, by God, through the prophet, by these words. So, the first time that Paul uses or makes reference to this language or to this verse is in Romans chapter 14 and verses 11 and 12.

[6 : 49] Verse 11 particularly, but as we read verse 12, it just helps explain a little bit more how he understands this language. So, let me just read those verses. Romans chapter 14 and verse 11. It is written, As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me, every tongue will confess to God.

So, the equivalent to what Isaiah says that by me every tongue will swear is this language of every tongue will confess to God. And Paul goes on and throws a little bit more light in the matter by saying, so then each of us will give an account of himself to God. So, there's a sense in which this confessing to God involves us speaking to God and declaring to God something. So, that's the first occasion that Paul makes use of this language. He does so there explicitly. It is written. He's declaring that this is something he is drawing from the Scriptures. And the second occasion, it's the passage that we read in Philippians. And we can just remind ourselves of the relevant verses from verse 9.

Again, the second part of the verse in Isaiah, where we have this slightly more or slightly less clear language of by me every tongue will swear, on both the occasions that Paul makes use of this language, there is this slight divergence, I suppose you might say, in terms of the verb that he employs, and it's the verb to confess. Now, the immediate reason for that is that in the Greek translation of this verse in Isaiah, that is the Greek verb that is used, and Paul simply uses the same one.

So, the equivalent to the word swear in Isaiah is the word confess that we find there in Romans and Philippians. Now, how does that help us, or how does that give us somewhat more insight into what it is that is being said? Well, I think what it confirms for us is that as with the verb to bow, that every knee will bow, where there, I think very clearly, you have described an attitude of submission to God, of recognition of God, so in the verb confess, you have described those who are recognizing God for who He is, that He is indeed God, and submitting to God. So, this is what the prophet, this is what God through the prophet declares will happen, that every knee will bow, that every tongue will swear, or every tongue will confess who God is, and recognize God for who He is. Now, we said that there were certain aspects of this promise that we wanted to look at, and the first one was that it is a certain promise.

Now, the picture painted by these words, and very especially as they're employed by Paul in the Philippians passage, is a very stirring one. It is, and it's intended to be deeply encouraging for those of us living in relatively barren times in terms of gospel impact. Now, I don't think we should make the mistake of being overly morose about the days and the times in which we live, for God is very much active. But we do recognize that in our own land, in our own city, we do live in relatively barren times.

[10 : 46] But for us to be reminded of what God is declaring will happen, that there is a day, there is a day coming when every knee will bow, and where every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, that is of great encouragement. But the question might arise. We might not have the courage to each other to actually verbalize it, but we might ask, but, you know, that sounds great, but will it really happen?

How certain is this promise? Now, we were thinking along the same lines this morning regarding the first promise, or the promise we were thinking about this morning, turn to me and be saved. How can I know that this is true? And we notice that the foundation of our confidence is what God goes on to say, for I am God. Well, similarly with this promise we are given, God grants us a very firm foundation upon which to enjoy the confidence that this promise that this promise is indeed certain, and very particularly in the same verse, indeed in the words that God employs to introduce this declaration, this promise. And let's notice what He says there in verse 23, By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked.

Before me every knee will bow, by me every tongue will swear. Now, the punctuation that's been employed in our version suggests that these words in verse 23 are intended principally to introduce the promise we're thinking about this evening, that before God every knee will bow and every tongue will swear.

I think it's also legitimate to see what God says there as working backwards and forwards. It provides a foundation for the promise He has just made, turn to me and be saved, and it certainly provides the foundation for this declaration of God, before me every knee will bow and every tongue will swear.

God is saying, this will most assuredly and certainly happen. Why? By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity or in all righteousness a word that will not be revoked.

[13 : 22] The promise is grounded in God Himself. The security of the promise is grounded in the very nature of God. It is a promise imbued with the righteous character of God. My mouth has uttered in all integrity, or one way in which that could be translated, my righteous mouth has uttered. However we translate it, the overriding truth is the same, that this promise is grounded in the righteous character of God, in the trustworthiness of His Word and of His declarations. It is a promise or a word that will accomplish its purpose. It will not be revoked. Be very clear that God is not about to change His mind on this one. Nothing will happen that will lead God to say, oh yes, that's what I was planning to do, but I've changed my mind. By myself I have sworn. My mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked before me. Every knee will bow. By me every tongue will swear. And there may be those, and no doubt there would be those, who if they were presented with this declaration, they would simply smile or mock and say, well, what nonsense. And they would say, that's not going to happen.

My knee is not going to bow, and my tongue is not going to confess. But they're wrong. And they're wrong because this is a certain promise, grounded in the very character and righteousness and trustworthiness of God. It's a certain promise. But it is, as we've also noticed, a promise that is yet to be fulfilled. But though it is yet to be fulfilled, we can establish the occasion of its future fulfillment. The prophet does not give us that information. We can't find it in the passage in Isaiah, but we can establish the occasion of its fulfillment by the manner in which Paul makes use of the verse there in Romans in chapter 14 and verse 11. We've already read that verse. And of what occasion is Paul speaking when he draws to his arsenal in order to explain what he's saying in this verse?

Well, he's speaking of the day of judgment very clearly and very explicitly. He is speaking of that day, and he is saying that it is on that day that this affirmation of God, this promise of God, will find its fulfillment. On that day, every knee will bow. On that day, every tongue will swear or confess. The day of judgment that will follow, or we might perhaps better describe it, will form part of the great event that is the Lord's return. On that day, this promise will find its fulfillment. And that day has been fixed. We do not know the day, but the day has been fixed. It will happen. It is approaching. And on that day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess. It's a certain promise. It's a promise that's yet to be fulfilled, but the occasion has already been established. But I also suggested that this is a revealing promise and revealing truths that are important and very particularly, and our focus will be very narrow, though perhaps central, in revealing truth about Jesus. In our passage in Isaiah, God Himself is speaking. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other.

By myself I have sworn before me. It's explicit, beyond doubt, that it is God who is speaking through the prophet, but God is speaking. And God, through the prophet, unequivocally identifies Himself as the one before whom men will bow and whose name men will confess. That's very clear in Isaiah.

But to whom does Paul apply this honor? To whom does Paul recognize that this will find fulfillment? Well, to Jesus. The passage in Philippians is equally explicit, and we've read it already on two occasions, but we probably would do well just to read it again.

[18 : 11] Therefore, God exalted Him, that is Jesus, to the highest place, and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Now, I say that Paul applies this honor to Jesus, but more correctly, it is God the Father who does so, and Paul simply records what the Father has determined. And it would be difficult to identify a more unequivocal declaration of the Son's Son's divine identity than this identification of Jesus as the one in whom this promise of the prophet Isaiah, of God, found in the prophet Isaiah, finds fulfillment. And of course, it does so in the letter to the Philippians in the context of a passage that is rich in evidence and in arguments that would persuade us as to the Son's divine identity. And so, in that sense, it is a revealing promise, because as we look at it in the manner in which it is originally given to us by God, and as we compare it with the manner in which Paul employs the language in Philippians, we can come to no other conclusion than that Jesus is indeed the eternal Son of God, very God of very God. So, it's a revealing promise.

But it's also a universal promise. The language is universal. Before me, every knee will bow. By me, every tongue will swear. Who are included in the every? Well, it's not a trick question. Everybody is included.

Every knee, every tongue. Now, this morning we began by maybe fantasizing, if that's the right word, about our political masters turning to the Lord. Now, they may in this life, but equally they may not. But there's no such uncertainty, if we can call it that, with regard to this promise, because they will all bow, and they will all confess. Salmond and Sturgeon, Lamont and Davidson, and yes, even my friend Patrick Harvey.

They'll all bow the knee and confess with their tongue that Jesus Christ is Lord. And perhaps more to the point is that each and every one of us will also do so. And it is precisely this reality that every knee without exception and every tongue without exception will be involved is what makes this promise also what we call an intriguing or even a difficult promise. Because the question that demands an answer is this, how can this be? It's very clear that this is what is being stated, but how can this be? How can God assert that everybody without exception will bow before Him and confess His name?

Are we to understand this as a declaration of universal salvation? We recognize that the language is universal in its scope is that that's what God is saying, that ultimately all will be saved.

[21 : 39] Is God promising that at the end of the day, all will be reconciled to Him, all will be saved? Well, the clear and repeated teaching of Scripture is rather of a great divide between those who believe and those who refuse to believe, between the saved and the lost. But not only is that the clear teaching of Scripture generally, it is also the clear teaching of this very passage in Isaiah. What God is promising or asserting is that on the promised day, all will recognize Him and all will submit to Him, but not that all will be saved. And we can distinguish between those two groups using the very language of the passage. We can distinguish between those who will bow and confess exultantly and those who will bow and confess shamefully or with shame. The submission will be either exultant submission or it will be shameful submission. And we do well to take note because we will be, all of us, in one or other of these groups. And let's just very briefly notice these two groups as they're described for us in our passage.

Who are those who will bow and confess exultantly or joyfully? Well, they are spoken of in verse 24, at the beginning of the verse, in verse 25. They will say of me, in the Lord alone are righteousness and strength. And then in verse 25, but in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult. So, the beginning of verse 24 and verse 25. And I just want to draw to your attention one interesting aspect to these two descriptions of those who will submit on that day and will do so joyfully, exultantly. And notice the common theme or the common language of the word righteousness. Those who bow, those who confess joyfully are those who, first of all, recognize the righteousness of God. Then in verse 24, they will say of me, in the Lord alone are righteousness and strength. And they are also those who are found righteous. Notice there in verse 25. But in the

Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult, will rejoice. Both are necessary. And the second is more difficult to immediately understand. How can God find sinners righteous? I think we can understand how sinners could be enabled to recognize that God is righteous.

That's something we can get our heads around. Yes, that makes sense, that a sinner would be enabled to recognize that God is righteous. Okay. But how can God find sinners righteous? That's a lot more difficult. Why? Because we're not righteous. And so, there seems to be a contradiction there that we need to deal with. And of course, the answer is that the righteousness spoken of in verse 25, when we're told that those who exult, those who will rejoice on that day, will be found righteous, is a righteousness not our own. The very prophet Isaiah speaks in this very book of how righteousness is a gift that we receive from God through the work of Messiah. We turn to Isaiah 53, just two or three pages on from our passage and from reading from verse 11. What do we read there? And we'll read actually from the English Standard Version, so probably best just to listen as I read, though if you want to follow in the NIV, by all means. But listen to the language employed or the manner in which the verse is translated in the ESV. Out of the anguish of his soul, and it's speaking of the suffering servant of the promised Messiah, out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied. By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. The salvation that is the necessary consequence of turning to God that we were thinking about this morning, turn to me and be saved, that salvation includes God's gift of Christ's imputed righteousness, of the righteousness of Christ being given to us that we might be clothed with it, to use also the language that we find in Scripture to speak of this great gift of Christ's righteousness to God. And so, how is it that those who on that day submit to God joyfully, how is it that they are found righteous? Well, they are found righteous because they have been given the righteousness of Jesus. And so, we rejoice. So, we exult. Notice that those who do so are all the descendants of Israel there in verse 25. That is, those from every nation, from every language, from every tribe who are gathered into the spiritual Israel. These are those who will bow and confess joyfully. But then, more solemnly and much more briefly, who are those who bow and confess shamefully?

Well, they are those who rage against God. Then, in verse 24, all who have raged against Him will come to Him and be put to shame. They, too, will come to Him. They, too, will bow before Him. They, too, will recognize who He is and recognize His authority and His majesty and His government and His rule over them. They will bow.

[27 : 32] They will confess, but they will be put to shame. And who are they? All who have raged against Him. What a terribly solemn thing it is to rage against God. Today, they rage. Tomorrow, they will bow and confess in shame. And so, the very important question for each of us to consider as we draw things to a close is how will we bow on that day? How will we confess on that day? How will you bow? How will you confess?

Will you do so joyfully? Or will you do so with shame? That is the big question. That is the question that we all must tackle and have an answer to. And my prayer is that all of us, and indeed all those whom we love, and all those with whom we would share the gospel, that they would, in this life, know what it is to bow before King Jesus and confess His name so that on that great day, they will do so, and do so more richly and more deeply, but do so joyfully and not covered in shame, as will be so for those who rage against Him in this life. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the manner in which it tackles matters that are solemn and that are of great moment and importance. And we pray that You would help us to deal with these truths ourselves as we consider our own lives and where we stand before You, but also as we consider our responsibilities as Your people, as we are reminded of the solemn realities of eternity and of a lost eternity. Lord, we pray that this would be that which would, together with so many other motivations that we have, that which would motivate us and impulse us to share with others the good news concerning Jesus, that we would, in our lives, bow before Him today, that we would, with our lives and with our lips, confess His name, and confess His name in song and in praise and to one another, but also confess the name of Jesus to those who as yet do not know Him, indeed to those who as yet have not even heard of Him in any meaningful way. And these things we pray in His name. Amen.

We'll close our service this evening by singing Psalm 87, the whole of the Psalm. It's on page 115, the final verse that we just thought of very fleetingly this evening, speaks of how all the descendants of Israel will rejoice on that day. And of course, there it is speaking not only of ethnic Israel, but of spiritual Israel, of those from every nation who will be able to declare that their birth was spiritually in Jerusalem. And this is a Psalm that also recognizes this reality.

We might read it and think it sounds very odd, the language used, but we read it with that insight that what is being declared is that the people of God are indeed a global people, and that there are God's people born in every nation, in every land. And this is a Psalm that celebrates that. So, Psalm 87, to the tune Love Divine, we'll sing the whole of this Psalm, and we'll stand to sing.

On Jerusalem's holy mountain He has founded His Sabbath, the Mary's father's coming in with the great work of the great work of the cross beyond the dream.

[31 : 30] Father and Son of theitaries, the Great work of the sacrifice of God is there. Father and see that God has now. I'm sorry to thank you.

Lord, student whose villages are on theencias of■■■ut. Then he's brought from all the nations, as your people I recall.

I will give as those who know me, each with time and power alone.

Fill this time, along with crucial, I will count as Zion born.

Yes, it will be said, O Zion, this time that for me reloverd.

[32 : 49] And on earth the highest blessing will descend and make her strong.

Born in Zion, God will enter in the people's register.

They will sing as they make music. All my fountains are in heaven.

Amen. Amen. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.