

## GOD PROMISES AND PROVIDES—A CERTAIN HOPE FOR 2023

Good morning church! Welcome to the second full week in a New Year.

In one of her amazing Christmas Albums of the 90's **Amy Grant** sings of the birth of Jesus in her song, "**Welcome to our World**". To summarize key lyrics, "You've been promised, we've been waiting; long awaited Holy Stranger, make yourself at home; bring your peace..." We here at Fellowship and those saved ones around the world know this Holy Stranger as our personal savior, **King Jesus** who makes and keeps **promises**; the One we rely on for eternal life and for a joyful life while we are here.

Today we will be doing something a little **different** than participating in a normal message based on a bible passage or relating to a sermon series. But, we will see the theme of **abiding** and we will depend **on God's Word** as we take a look at the **past, present and future** of this local body of Christ. It's a message similar to those you have heard the last three years from this platform. And, **spoiler alert**, we have been, are now and will continue to be a church where the **Word of God is preached, Jesus the Savior God is made known, and the Triune God, (Father, Son, and Spirit) is glorified!!**

**Looking back, in the year 2022**, through your generosity and through your personal involvement Fellowship continued to serve ministries both here and abroad. You recently received communication from the church citing some statistics on the where and the when of this, but briefly:

\*We support ministries in South Sudan, India, and Nicaragua and Germany where hundreds of people are trusting Christ as Savior, being baptized, and pastors are being trained for leadership

\*Operation Christmas child sent gifts to 410 children around the world

\*At family nights at Fellowship over 700 had the opportunity to hear the message of the gospel of salvation through Jesus alone

\*We have an active ministry of young adults, with over 100 people involved on a regular basis

\*400 of us are in life groups as we define them here and many more meeting together for discipleship

\*251 of you gave of yourselves serving as greeters, leaders of youth and children's ministries, life group leaders, service teams participants and in other ways.

\*Perhaps most impressive of all, there is no way to count how many of you, having been equipped and encouraged at Fellowship, serve as gospel messengers and disciplinarians in parachurch ministries, in mentoring relationships, in your places of work, and in your homes with your children.

**At present** we have just celebrated the arrival of Jesus on planet earth, the reason we come to this place. We honor Him as not just the newborn babe, but as the **King**, whom we seek, the One we want to know and love more each day. We are in the process of healing from our recent change and mourning over it. We are prepared to continue to take **Kingdom ground every day for the glory of the King**.

We have said on many occasions how important the months of December and June are for the **budget year** at Fellowship. This is because the fiscal year is July 1-June 30. The end of December is not only the halfway point but is also the time of year some of you give a lump sum for the year or give additional gifts from bonuses or business profits. Each year at the end of December we have normally received 50% or more of the annual giving budget. This year with the last Sunday in December falling on Christmas day and the first Sunday of the new year falling in Jan. 1, with mail only available to us 4 days this week, it is hard to tell exactly how much giving for 2022 will be received. But, as near as we can tell, it appears it will be about 45% of the budget. What does this mean for Fellowship? At this time, nothing, really. The church is debt free and we maintain a cash reserve so we can make it through times of uneven giving every year. And, it means we still have 6 months until the end of the fiscal year to make up the difference.

**Looking forward** just like every year at this time, we have plans for the year ahead. We need to make a key hire to fill the role of pulpit leadership. In the tradition of ensuring the **Word of God is preached, Jesus the Savior God is revealed and the Triune God is glorified**, we will make that selection thoughtfully and prayerfully. Priority will be given to identifying the best means of delivering the message on Sunday, filling leadership roles and the best people to do so.

To elaborate on that, the elders will be seeking input from staff and covenant and congregation members to help determine the best way to move forward in the pastor search, and priorities to be considered going forward, both affirmation of existing ones and consideration of new ones. We will always remain true to the key doctrines of the faith as revealed in the Word of God, the bible.

At this time we are

- interviewing search firm candidates
- finalizing sermon topics and means of ongoing spiritual maturity
- recruiting outside preaching resources to help with the Sunday messages

All the while the work of this local body will continue, providing ways to serve our church, the city and the world. God will be worshipped, sacraments will be experienced, life groups will meet to inform and challenge us toward discipleship, we will continue to connect new folks to the rest of the church body and we will continue to be led from the pulpit on an interim basis by preachers and teachers who can inform and inspire us and point us to **King Jesus** to know and love Him more. In short, our lives of disciples here at Fellowship will continue.

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I have said what I said with a ring of **certainty**. So, how can we be sure about what is to come? Because we have about 2100 years of **promises made and promises kept** from when God first called Abram until he fulfilled that **promise** in Jesus. Jesus made **promises** also, to 12 men 2000 years ago, that He would be with them, as they did greater work than He did, and look what he did through them—2.5 billion who call themselves Christians all over the world today! And, right here at Fellowship we have a history of God's provision for 45 years.

In every new year we have opportunities and challenges at home, or at Fellowship, or at work, in our personal lives, or wherever, and we can rely on the one who is no longer a holy stranger because we know Him to be the One Who **promises and who provides**. 2023 will be no different.

**David and Kristy Martin** are friends from Germany. Graduates of Texas A&M, they have been there over 20 years and have raised four kids. David and I met in 1999 at a class at DTS, where I learned he worked for Young Life, a ministry Kathleen and I had supported locally for about 10 years. He still does today and is responsible for taking the gospel to and making disciples of teenagers throughout all countries in Europe where German is the national language, over 100 million in total population. We have seen their kids grow up and have been in their home in Germany. David is 58 and at the peak of his effectiveness, leading a large staff, preaching in his local church and personally ministering to kids.

We received an email from David and Kristy last week. She wrote:

David was diagnosed with stage two throat cancer. He will have surgery to remove the tumor as well as the lymph nodes on the left side of his neck. His surgery will take place some time in January, but the exact date is still being determined. After surgery he'll need to be in the hospital for 7 days to manage the pain. According to the doctor, it's going to be a painful journey.

David wrote:

Overall, we are very hopeful. Somehow, I believe God has something beautiful for us in this journey. Please pray for us:

1. Pray for a complete recovery.
4. Pray that I will represent God and His Kingdom well through this.
5. Pray that God would be glorified most of all. By the way, I really mean this.

Entering into 2023, how can David write this? My observation is that he has been seeking Jesus almost all of his adult life, he has been abiding with Him, and Jesus has captivated David's heart.

As we in this room, or hearing this on the broadcast, enter into 2023 we don't know what is ahead, but we do know what we have been promised, and that God commands us to **participate** so that his **promises** may be fulfilled. In many instances and many ways **Jesus the King** says to seek Him and enjoy the benefits. **How good is that!!** Let's be reminded of this incomparable **promise** from 3 places in the Word.

**In Matthew 6** from the sermon on the mount,

<sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear....<sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?....<sup>28</sup> "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you— you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

What does it mean to seek first the kingdom? It is a command to seek the **King** first, because the kingdom is where the **King** lives. Simple!

Seeking something first comes at a cost. It means I can't put anything else ahead of it. Jesus specifically addresses worry and anxiety. We might include modern day idols of money, power, fame, pleasure and leisure time. It's easy to understand the reason Jesus might want us to put these at the bottom of our "to seek" list, or delete them altogether.

But, you might ask, "what if I am seeking mercy and good, or working to help the poor or to feed the hungry" or other things pleasing to God. A reasonable response would be to ask why Jesus didn't list any of those as worthy of first place. He did not. He said to seek the kingdom, Him first. It is out of making God first in our lives that we are led to, taught to, empowered to then do everything pleasing to Him.

Questions: If you are not, if I am not, seeking Him first—what am I missing that He wants from me and for me as He equips me for it? And, if I am not seeking Him first, am I seeking Him at all?

A complementary teaching is found in **Hebrews 12**. It follows chapter 11, often referred to as the heroes of the faith chapter, opening with the promise of a certain faith in 11:1-2

### **Hebrews 11:1-2**

The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see. The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd.

Our faith in the person, the promise and the power of Jesus is not blind faith, It is faith that sees into uncertainty; as we view it today, it is faith that carries us into 2023 with hope and joy, and makes the verses in Hebrews 12:1-2 even more understandable.

### **Hebrews 12:1(b)-2 (a)**

let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, <sup>2</sup>fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

**Billy Graham's** message was simple but biblical: "God loves you and has a plan for your life" ....**the race marked out for us.**

Fixing our eyes on Jesus is more than a glance. It is a choice to gaze steadily on the One Who loves us and has a plan for us and to live it out, even as it revealed to us every day.

Again, and the last of three, in

### **Philippians 4**

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice ... The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

This one ties it all together. Instead of worry, pray. Instead of worry, focus on what is good, true and beautiful—and what, who, is more so than **King Jesus!** And look at the **promise!!**—the peace of God and God of peace. God **for** us in peace and God **with** us in presence!!

Scott and Julie Peek are followers of Jesus, seeking after Him obediently. He is a senior executive in the Baylor Scott White Hospital group. They are active in their church and in the local community where they live, McKinney. Parents of two girls who will be together in college next year, life is good for the Peeks. Recently Scott finalized a change in his career, agreeing to take a position in Denver as president of a regional hospital system. They enter into 2023 with a bright future, eager to settle into their new community and serve their Lord.

David and Kristy and Scott and Julie. Two life stories, that reflect in various degrees the story of each of us who seek, fix our eyes on and focus on King Jesus. Whether, facing negative or positive changes in life neither knows what 2023 will hold for them, but they know who is in control and who makes and keeps promises in all of life's journeys.

How well do we know this God, this **King Jesus**, Immanuel, God with us? The more we do the more the year 2023 will be of no concern to us. We can avoid letting our **wondering about the future turn to worry** about the future. We have no reason to worry, as we seek first the kingdom, where the **King** lives, as we fix our eyes on Jesus, who has a plan for us, and as we focus on Him above all else, the giver of peace and of Himself. Here is a great reminder of the nature and power of this **King**.

Video of S. M. Lockridge 3+ minutes (That's my King!)  
<https://youtu.be/yzqTFNfeDnE>

I don't know about you, but this makes me want to **rejoice!** We have a King, a sovereign Who knows the future, Who loves us and Who will provide. Hallelujah!

Benediction