

But You Promised!

Last Sunday we talked about laughing with Abraham and Sarah. This morning I want to go back and visit their story again. The long years between the promise given to them and the fulfillment of that promise are informative and instructional for us. Most of us have faced that reality at some point in our life. Someone promised something and then failed to deliver on the promise. Or they promised but it was weeks or months or even years before they made good on that promise. Or circumstances changed and caused a delay. If you are a parent, at some point you've said something like, "I promise we will do it but we can't do it right now." And with appropriate drama you heard your child say, "But you promised!"

Most of us have faced that in our walk with the Lord as well. We read the promises of God in the bible or we feel in our heart and spirit that the Lord has given us an assurance concerning something and then we wait and wait and nothing happens. "But you promised, Lord!" We asked for something and we counted on a certain outcome but things turned out entirely different and we say, "But you promised, Lord." We are then faced with the challenge of what to do as we wait for the fulfillment of the promise. I think we can learn something about what to do and what not to do from Abraham and Sarah.

Turn with me to Genesis 12 and let's walk through part of the story. The Lord calls Abram (we'll just call him Abraham) and tells him to leave his home and journey to a land the Lord would show him. At that time the Lord gives this promise to Abraham. **"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** Genesis 12:2-3. Based on that promise and relying upon the faithfulness of the one who promised, Abraham takes his wife Sarah and all he has and leaves for the land God promised him.

He travels essentially from Iraq (Ur), to southeastern Turkey (Haran) and then to the promised land of Canaan. Because of a famine in the land he travels to Egypt and after some misadventures in Egypt (you can read about it in Genesis 12) they return to the land of promise. Because the Lord had prospered Abraham and all that were with him including his nephew Lot, they decide to separate. It was too crowded for all of their herds to graze together and there were arguments between their herdsmen. Abraham allows Lot to choose the land he desires, so Lot

chooses the well watered plain of the Jordan and heads toward Sodom to settle there. Abraham moves west into the Judean hills and west of the Dead Sea in Hebron. He is left wondering about the land to which he now moves to possess and still childless, Abraham wonders if the promise is still good. Does God remember what he said? So the promise is reaffirmed to Abraham. After Lot moves to the East, God says to Abraham, **“Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.” Genesis 13:14-16.**

It sounds like we are still good to go. The promise is still before him, but Abraham and Sarah aren't getting any younger. God keeps talking about Abraham and his offspring possessing all this land, yet he isn't exactly taking over the land, there are still Canaanites and Perizites living in the land (Genesis 13:7) and he and Sarah still don't have any children. There is no heir to inherit anything. When will God fulfill the promise?

In Genesis 14, Lot is captured by kings from the North, (Iraq) and Abraham sets out to rescue his nephew and his family. Abraham defeats these kings and comes back home. He has rescued Lot and his children but Abraham is still waiting for God to fulfill his promise and give him children.

It's interesting what God said to Abraham in a vision recorded in Genesis 15. **“Do not be afraid Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” Genesis 15:1** I always hate it when God tells me not to be afraid. It makes me think there is going to be something ahead that will frighten me. “Don't be afraid.” And then look what he tells him. “I am your shield and your very great reward.” It's almost as if God is saying, “Abraham, you don't need to worry about the fulfillment of the promise when you have me! I am your very great reward. Even if you never have one square foot of land or even if you never have a child, you have me and I am all you will ever need. I'm your reward. Don't be afraid. Trust me. Wait with me!”

Can we trust the Lord and accept that he is our very great reward? Even if we never see the fulfillment of another promise in our lifetime, can we rest in the fact that God alone is our shield and God alone is our very great reward. He is more than enough so we won't be afraid. We can rest and trust and wait in peace because regardless of what comes or not, He is our very great reward!

Abraham finally dares to ask the Lord about the promise. **“O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? You have given me no children so a servant in my household will be my heir.”** Then the word of the Lord came to him: **‘This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.’** He took him outside and said, **‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them.’** Then he said to him, **‘So shall your offspring be.’”** Genesis 15:2-5

Once again God affirms his promise to Abraham. Trust me, trust my timing. Wait with me. And the bible says, **“Abram believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness.”** Genesis 15:6.

The Lord then gave Abraham instructions to sacrifice a heifer, a goat, a ram, a dove and a pigeon. It was an ancient means of entering into a covenant. Abraham cut the animals in two and laid the halves across from each other, leaving enough room for two people to walk between the pieces. They were essentially saying “may this happen to us if we break the covenant.” (Jeremiah 34:18-20 illustrates this making of a covenant.)

Once again, Abraham found himself waiting on God to show up and do something. Abraham waited through the day until finally he fell into a deep sleep and a dreadful darkness came over him. Through an extraordinary experience, God enters into a covenant with Abraham. By the end of Genesis 15 Abraham has a promise from God, a covenant with God and has been declared righteous through his faith. But he still has no children. That promise still hasn't been fulfilled. “God you promised.” What do you do while you wait for the fulfillment of God's promise? Four things you should or should not do. Unfortunately, some people...

Give up on the promise. Some folks just doubt and give up on the promise. I wonder if that may be in part what motivated Lot to separate from his uncle Abraham. Their possessions and herds were so great that they needed more land, but remember the whole land had been promised to Abraham and his offspring. You would think Lot would want to stay close to Abraham since God made the promise to him. But maybe Lot was thinking, “Abraham said he heard a voice tell him he would give him this whole land but he also said the voice told him he would give him a child as an heir. Abraham and Sarah are getting older and are still childless. Maybe no child, no heir means no land either. Maybe he imagined the whole thing. There are

kings in this land and other peoples and I don't see Abraham settling down to take possession of it, he is still living in a tent and following the herds to grazing land. I never heard a voice promising anything. Maybe Uncle Abraham made this whole thing up. He may be getting a little senile in his old age. I think I'll take my chances on my own and head up to Sodom. It looks like a nice city and the kids have been wanting to live in town instead of out in the country. That's what I'll do. We'll move to Sodom."

Lot doubted the promise, gave up on it and decided to go out on his own. The next thing you know Lot gets himself captured by invading kings and has to be rescued by Abraham. And of course we all know what eventually happened to Lot and his family in Genesis 19. The city of Sodom is destroyed, his wife disobeys God and dies and his daughters, influenced by the immorality of Sodom, get their father drunk and sleep with him, giving birth to sons that become dreaded enemies of the Israelites. (The Moabites and Ammonites).

If God promised, hold on to the promise. Keep waiting with him. Keep trusting him and don't doubt, don't abandon the promise like Lot did. How things would have been different if Lot had trusted the promise of the Lord. Instead of giving up on the promise, I suggest we....

Defend the promise. The events recorded in Genesis 15 are fascinating to me. From the beginning when God declares that he is Abraham's shield and great reward, to the end when a smoking firepot and a blazing torch appear and pass between the pieces of the sacrifice to seal the covenant and the promise of God, it is an extraordinary story. After God affirms the promise again of a child and Abraham's offspring possessing all of this land, Abraham asks, "How can I know that I will gain possession of it?" As we mentioned earlier the Lord then tells him to bring the animals and cut them in two for the sealing of the covenant. Notice this detail the bible shares, "**Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.**" **Genesis 15:11.**

Abraham waited all day for something to happen. Maybe he had gotten used to it by now: waiting on God, waiting to possess the land, waiting to have a child. He is waiting to see what God will do next when vultures came down on the carcasses and Abraham has to drive them away. Abraham has to act to defend the plan and purpose of God for his life. Let me tell you, sometimes you have to defend the promise from vultures. Sometimes while you are waiting on God to fulfill his word and his promise in your life, the vultures will start trying to pick at you

and try to steal the promise. They will try to destroy the dream that God planted in your heart. The vultures will try to plant doubt and fear and every negative thought to discourage, to defeat you, to cause you to abandon the promise and give up. While you wait on God, you may have to do like Abraham and drive away the vultures. You may have to defend the promise from the vultures that will come at you. I don't know what or whom the vultures may be that are trying to destroy the promise of God in your life. It could be another person. It could be negative thoughts and fear. It could be bad habits and choices. It could be sin that you tolerate in your life. All of those things can be like vultures trying to steal the promise of God from you, to cause you to doubt or give up on the promise. Listen – do what Abraham did and believe the Lord. Trust him and his timing. Don't give up and don't give in. Defend the promise and drive away the vultures. The promise of God and his plan and purpose for your life is worth defending! His calling upon your life is worth every effort, every sacrifice made to defend it. Defend the promise of God. Unfortunately, some people, including Abraham and Sarah, instead of defending the promise, they choose to

Force the promise. Genesis 16:3 tells us that Abraham and Sarah had been living in Canaan for 10 years and still had no children. Ten years of waiting for the promise of a child with no success so they decide to take matters into their own hands and force the promise. Instead of trusting God, that in his timing and in his way he will bring this to pass; instead of trusting God's timing and his Sovereign plans and purposes; instead of acting in faith, they decide to accomplish God's purposes by their own efforts, so Sarah tells Abraham to sleep with her Egyptian servant Hagar and have a child with her. Instead of waiting and doing this God's way, we will do it our way, by our own ingenuity and effort.

Have you ever decided to go ahead and do it your way instead of God's way? Or do something in your timing instead of in God's timing? There was a reason why God was waiting. He was removing future obstacles. Perhaps he was forming and building character in you so you could handle the promise and the blessing that was coming. The problem is, you go ahead and force the fulfillment of the promise without the character you need being formed in you, the qualities you will need aren't there yet, the training you needed, you circumvented that, the wisdom and experience you needed to handle it all are not there and now, the results may be disastrous. When we do things our way and in our time, we end up spending a lot of time trying

to undo what we've just done.

Abraham has a child by Hagar and it causes nothing but trouble for Abraham and Sarah and for the nation of Israel. Hagar and Abraham's son was named Ishmael and God told Hagar, his mother that "**[Ishamel's] hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand will be against him and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.**" **Genesis 16:12.** Go to the Middle East and to the Muslim world and ask them who Abraham's son of promise was and they will tell you it was Ishmael and not Isaac. Ishamel's descendants are still living in hostility toward all their brothers.

You can force the promise, take matters into your own hands, force the timing on things, but you will get what your hand of flesh can provide and the trouble that goes with it. But if you will trust God and trust God's timing and act in obedience, you will get that supernatural fulfillment of the vision and the promise of God and it will prove to be greater than anything you could have conceived on your own.

You can doubt the promise or you can defend the promise. You can force the promise or finally, you can... **Stand on His promise in faith.** I told you earlier Genesis 15:6 tells us that Abraham believed the Lord and he credited it to him as righteousness. He believed in spite of everything he saw to the contrary.

In the New Testament book of Acts, Stephen, the first martyr of the church is speaking to the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin. He said of Abraham, "**God sent him to this land where you are now living. He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.**" **Acts 7:4-5.** God told Abraham that it would be a while before the promise would be fulfilled. He told him his descendants would be strangers, enslaved and mistreated in a country not their own for 400 years, but then God would deliver them and bring them into this land to possess it.

And Abraham chose to believe the promise. He believed God, in faith, regardless of the timing involved. He stood on the promise of God. Romans 4 says of Abraham, "**Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'** Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead - since he was about a hundred years old - and that

Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.” Romans 4:18-21

Hebrews 11 tells us that Sarah and Abraham believed that the God who promised them was indeed faithful. They were fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised to do! Do you? Are you ready to hope against all hope? Are you ready to believe God is faithful and he will fulfill his promise to you? Are you fully persuaded that God has the power to do what he has promised in your life?

Maybe you are waiting for a healing in your body. Maybe you are waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise for salvation for a member of your family or a friend. You've prayed and you know in your heart it is going to happen but you've waited and nothing has happened. What are you going to do? Doubt the promise and give up? Force the promise like Abraham and Sarah and end up with another Ishmael?

Maybe the vultures have been landing and trying to defeat you and your faith. You're believing God for victory over sin in your life and the vultures are convincing you that you can't change, you can't be free, you can't overcome. What will you do? Give up, or will you defend the promise against the vultures that want to defeat you. Will you stand in faith and declare the promises of God? Refusing to waver, refusing to give in to the doubt and fear – like Abraham you are fully persuaded that God has the power to do what he promised! This is what the Lord said and I am going to stand upon his promises. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I am going to trust God. I am going to trust his timing, I am going to rest in his mercy and I will see it come to pass in God's good time.

Can you believe with me, for the promises of God to be fulfilled? “But you promised and nothing has happened!” Yes but he is faithful. Let's be fully persuaded like Abraham and Sarah that God has the power to do what he has promised and he will bring it to pass in his time and in his way. Trust him and keep on trusting!