

“PROMISES - PROMISES!”

Genesis 15:1-6

PROMISES - PROMISES...we've all made them and we've all broken them. Promises are like a vow, a commitment, a pledge, a guarantee, something we say we're going to do. You tell your child: “After supper, we'll go out and throw the ball.” Parents tell their school age kids: “Friday, we'll go to Target for that backpack for school.” You tell your spouse: “We'll go out to dinner Saturday”. But sometimes, something comes up unexpectedly and we don't/can't follow through with what we've promised. It's not the end of the world, but there is always some disappointment – even if you completely understand the situation. Do that often enough and pretty soon your children, spouse, or friend wonders whether they can believe your promises at all anymore!

In our text from Genesis, Moses writes by God's Spirit of a story of how Abraham handles promises from the Lord God. This patriarch, called the “**Father of believers**” experiences the greatest challenges to his faith the Lord could ever contrive. I don't know if you or I could pass this test. But in a very real sense, we do experience great challenges to our faith every single day.

Let's visit the Lord's visit with Abraham and learn the real lesson about:

“PROMISES - PROMISES!”

Are those just shallow words or do they carry some weight when spoken by God? I believe we know the answer. Those words are

1. REASSURING
2. RELIABLE

1

Our text says: **AFTER THIS**... What's “this”?

Abraham's story follows the dilemma of Abraham and Lot's wealth. They had grown so large in their wealth that they needed separate & distant areas to raise their herds. Lot chose areas in the immoral Sodom/Gomorrah area. Abra. chose the land of Canaan. When the arch enemies of S/Gom waged war, Sodom was no match and Lot & his clan was carried off as prisoners of war along with the rest.

Word of this siege got back to Abram. He recruited 318 of his finest soldiers, split up in divisions, and attacked the enemy kings and rescued his nephew Lot along with all his goods and possession. The king of Sodom was so grateful that he wanted to reward Abram with abundant treasures. But Abram refused because he didn't want to receive the praise for this victory over God. God had given him the victory. It was the power of God that worked through the soldiers to get Lot back.

You'd think Abram would be on top of the world after this. But he had this gnawing feeling that those wicked kings would come back for revenge against him. That brings us to our words in chapter 15: **AFTER THIS... THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO ABRAM IN A VISION**. God intervenes in the life of this patriarch with **PROMISES – PROMISES**, which are first “reassuring”. The first promise out of God's mouth in this vision says: **DO NOT BE AFRAID, ABRAM. I AM YOUR SHIELD, YOUR VERY GREAT REWARD**. “I am your protection against the Eastern kings. I gave you one victory already and I promise that I will keep you safe and be your greatest possession much more than gaining riches.” How reassuring these words.

But Abram's internal struggle between God's promise of blessing him into a great nation, and being a blessing to all nations through him put a choke-hold on his heart. Because to this point, he and his wife Sarah were still childless. What he wanted most, he didn't have – that was a descendant. For him to go childless was to lose the inheritance God had promised and nature's time clock was ticking quickly. You sense agony in his words: **O SOVEREIGN LORD, WHAT CAN YOU GIVE ME SINCE I REMAIN CHILDLESS?**

Abram can't see what God sees. The only way he can figure this out was to use the custom of his day that when a man died without a natural born heir, his chief servant would inherit the estate. Eliezer was that trusted servant who would be next in line so Abram concludes that since he doesn't have any children, Eliezer would inherit this blessing. The problem with that is that also ends Abram's bloodline and thus the true line of the Messiah would end because it would not be his flesh/blood.

But God had other ideas. Still in this vision, God comes to Abram with another **reassuring promise** in response: **THIS MAN WILL NOT BE YOUR HEIR, BUT A SON COMING FROM YOUR OWN BODY WILL BE YOUR HEIR**. God affirms that he and Sarah would have a biological son, a son from their own flesh & blood. And to strengthen Abram's faith in that promise of being the ancestor of many descendants, including the Messiah, God took him outside and showed him a living canvass of stars. No glaring streetlights, houselights, or vehicle lights to obstruct the panoramic view. It was **Abram viewing a night tapestry** stitched by God along with his words: **LOOK UP AT THE HEAVENS AND COUNT THE STARS – IF INDEED YOU CAN...SO SHALL YOUR OFFSPRING BE!**

One can only imagine how reassuring God's promise was for Abram. He's given the promise of the line of the Messiah against all human odds, God brings **promise after promise to reassure** Abram that He would intervene and make an impossible situation possible.

Our Christian faith needs promises & promises from God just as much. Think of the most extreme situations you've faced in life. Remember when the medical tests came back cancer...when the boss called you in and you walked out with a pink slip...when you lost that child, or brother, or parent much sooner than you expected? Remember how you walked away from the Lord in worship & communion making his day as one of selfish rest for you, but not for your soul only a few years after confirmation, how your marriage completely collapsed and you were left on an island of depression?

It seemed helpless and hopeless. It looked bleak, with no way this would work out. We **doubted** God. We **questioned** God. We **blamed** God. We even concluded that God deserted us, that He didn't love us anymore or doesn't care. We sinned against God in his Word and completely disregarded what He says as the truth. We had to go our own ways, do our own thing, reject God's will and figure the only way out is to figure this out for myself. We turned away from his promises.

But God has promise after promise to reassure us. He says: **God so loved the world that He gave his one & only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.** {Jnn 3:16} Not perish? Have eternal life? Really – is that possible? He says: **Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.** {Heb 13:5} You mean someone is watching over me? He says: **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** {1 Pet 5:7} In spite of my sinful doubts, God still wants me and my worries, cares, and concerns? **But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** {Rom 5:8} No matter how many times I've slapped God in the face, He still loves me in Christ alone? Jesus says: **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die"**. {Jn 11:25-26}

Promises – promises...how **reassuring** are God's promises.

2

God is faithful – that means He keeps his promises. So not only are they reassuring, but they are also **RELIABLE!**

As incredible as God's promise was of a child to the childless Abram and Sarah, Abram did not waver in realizing how **RELIABLE** this promise was. He didn't understand and didn't need to. Our text says: **ABRAM BELIEVED THE LORD...** In the Hebrew, this word is a form sounds like the word Christian ends their prayers: **A-MEN**. In other words, Abram said **"AMEN"** to God's promise. That's what believing God is: to trust him and take him at his word, to throw oneself on his mercy. It means to strip away our feelings or perspective or opinions & resting totally on the Word of God because God's promises never lie.

ABRAM BELIEVED THE LORD AND HE CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. **Some call this the most important verse of the Bible.** Abram was righteous not by his works or anything he was or did, not because of noble character or good deed, but simply because he believed the promises of God. God regarded him as free and forgiven when he rested all his trust, all his faith on what God said. It wasn't Abram, it was the object of his faith, namely the promise of Jesus Christ which brought him the promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Abram simply trusted that what God said – he would do--no matter how impossible.

That's the saving faith we have too through the gift of the Holy Spirit. There's no one here who is good enough to believe, for we are sinners who souls are cast into the depths of hell. But Jesus lived and died and rose again to redeem us and free us from sin, death, and Satan. He's cleared our sinful record, removed our guilt and shame, and now promises eternal life for all who believe.

You are in worship to hear this Gospel. The Sacrament shows you God's love in Christ as you eat and drink the Lord's Body and Blood. **He's forgiven** you. **He's opened** heaven for you. **He promises** to care for you. **He promises** to be with you. Take these words to heart as the Spirit works in you. They are His promises: **reassuring and reliable!** They will not fail – **YOU HAVE GOD'S WORD ON THAT! AMEN**