“Big Promises, Big God”

March 11, 2018

Genesis 17:1-9

Please find with me the 4th chapter of Romans.

Today’s word is promise.

You may have heard the following true story. “Back in 1989, an 8.2 earthquake almost flattened Armenia, a country just south of Georgia and just due east of Turkey. The earthquake took the lives of more than 30,000 people in less than four minutes. It's hard to imagine the anguish and pain and the suffering that began in those four brief minutes of time -- people's lives were shaken and crushed. In spite of the devastation, such tragedies often bring out the best in people -- at least it provides a window to peak at the contents of each heart. Let me show you one story.

In the midst of chaos and destruction, a man rushed into his son's school. But instead of a school, he found a shape-less heap of rubble. We can only imagine what went through his mind. What would have gone through your mind? Shock? Shock is what affect the other parents who were walking around dazed, calling out their children's name.

But in the case of this father, the sight of rubble and ruin only made him spring into action. He ran to the back corner of the building where his son's class room used to be and began to dig. Why? What real hope did he have? What were the chances that his son could have survived such destruct-tion? All he knew was that he had made a promise to always be there for his son. It was this promise that gave strength to his body and motivated him mentally.

As he began to dig, numerous well-meaning parents tried to pull him out of the rubble saying: "It's too late!" "They're dead!" "You can't help!" "Go home!" "There's nothing you can do!" The fire chief tried to pull him off the rubble by saying, "Fires and explosions are happening everywhere. You're in danger. Go home!" Finally, the police came and said, "You're angry, distraught, but it's over. Go home." But this father had made a promise, and he was going to keep it!

The love this father had in his heart for his son kept him digging for eight . . . 12 . . . 24 . . . 36 hours. Then, in the 38th hour, he pulled back a boulder and heard his sons' voice crying for help. Immediately, he screamed, "ARMAND!" Back came the words, "Dad!? I told them! I told the other kids that if you were still alive, you'd come and save me! You promised me, you said you'd always be there for me! You did it, dad! A determined father, a promise kept,…” [Found on <http://www.skywriting.net> “A Father’s Promise.”

The world is full of promises, isn’t it? Some make good on them and some don’t. I’d like to take you on a brief journey with me today. It’s the journey of a promise.

So, I’ll begin with this word from the LORD; Genesis 15:5 *“And he [God] brought him [Abraham] forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell [record] the stars, if thou be able to number [count] them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.”*

The promise is just five words “So shall thy seed be.”

In God’s created order, people hold the highest place. We are the greatest in rank when it comes to His Creatures. Your life matters -- to God. He created you for Himself. And the more I read and study God’s word, the more I find the lives of people recorded there and given by the Holy Spirit as our teachers. Abraham is one such teacher.

And what do we see happening in Abram’s life? We see God speaking to him. He’s telling Abram that he is to look up into the night sky count all the stars that he sees. And, according to the LORD, however many stars he can count, that’s how many descendants he will have.

Genesis 15:5 *“And he [God] brought him [Abraham] forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell [record] the stars, if thou be able to number [count] them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.”*

The promise is just five words “So shall thy seed be.” And it might just be the greatest promise ever made to a man. And yet, Abram is seventy-five and his wife Sarah is sixty-five years. Aren’t you glad that Abraham is being told to do this and not you and your spouse?

The average person looking up into the night sky can see about three thousand stars with the naked eye. So, I’m guessing that Abraham could see and maybe even count that many. On the other hand, Galileo, back in the 1500’s, with his crude telescope saw roughly 30,000. But, since Galileo and since the invention of very sophisticated telescopes, we’ve discovered that our solar system is part of a galaxy we call the Milky Way because it looks like someone tipped over a glass of milk.

We think that our Milky Way has about two hundred million stars in it. And we’ve gotten to the place now where we can see more and more stars. And today’s estimate is approximately 1025 (one followed by twenty-five zeros), or ten septillion stars in the universe.

And now, if you tried to count all those stars by yourself, you would need a computer. And your computer would have to be able to make ten million billion calculations per second. And it would take you and your computer thirty million years of non-stop counting to count all the stars. So, practically speaking, it’s impossible to count all the stars in the heavens.

Actually, there’s only one Person Who knows how many stars there really are; God. Jeremiah 33:22 *“As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me.”*

And here’s Psalm 147:4 *“He telleth [counts] the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.”*

Not only does the LORD know how many stars there are in His universe; but He’s given each of them a name. And what’s even more wonderful is this. Not only has the LORD named every star in the universe, He’s also concerned with you and me.

Here in the 147th Psalm you see the LORD putting an individual and their heartache on the same plane as His knowledge of the stars. Psalm 147:3 says this. Psalm 147:3 *“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. (4) He telleth [counts] the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. (5) Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.”*

So, with that in mind, I’ve titled today’s sermon “Big Promises, Big God.” Shall we pray?

God is an Infinite Person. And He’s omnipotent. He can do anything. Nothing is impossible for God. And He’s wonderfully personal. How do I know that? Because throughout history He’s spoken directly to some people. And, not only can He make big promises to us little human beings, He is able to fulfill them.

You see, on the same day that God challenged Abram to count the stars in the night sky, He changed Abram’s name. He re-named him Abraham, which means “Father of many nations” or “Father of a multitude.” And, as with the stars, only God knows how many descendants Abraham has.

Now, no one appreciates someone who makes promises and doesn’t fulfill them. But, when someone makes you a promise and then makes good on it, you are deeply appreciative.

Now, please look with me at Abraham and God’s promise to him here in Romans chapter four. Here’s verse thirteen. Please take note of the Paul’s references to the promise; verse thirteen.

Romans 4:13 *“For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. (14) For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: (15) Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.*

*(16) Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (17) (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not*

*as though they were. (18) Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. (19) And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:*

*(20) He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; (21)**and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (22) And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.”*

I wonder how many people think that Abraham was a most unusual man and not like us, because, after all, he was seventy-five when God made this promise to him and his son was not born to him and Sarah until he was one hundred years old. So Abraham must have been one amazing man.

But, let me say this. Both Abraham and the Apostle Paul as well as Jesus Himself wants us to know that God is the One Who made the promise. All Abraham had to do was to believe it. Folks, I admit that the promises made to Abraham are big. But God is big. And you too have been given promises by the LORD. And what does He require? He requires of you, but that you believe them.

So, Big Promises, Big God.

First, then, why do you think God makes promises?

Couldn’t the LORD just do what He said and never have had that conversation with Abraham? Couldn’t He just bring all these descendants into the world without conversing with anybody about it?

Well, yes, He could. But He didn’t. He chose not to. Instead, He spoke a promise and all He asked of Abraham was that He believe that promise.

Here’s the reason God makes promises. God’s promise is His Word. And the only way to live with God is to trust Him. And, whenever you trust His Word, you are trusting Him.

The most important aspect of your life is your faith because without it you will never be able to please the LORD. Hebrews 11:6 *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: …”*

 Folks, the Bible clearly teaches that good works follow faith. But first God calls us to believe Him. That’s why He makes promises.

I’ve got a very interesting book in my library. Here it is. It was written by Dr. Herbert Lockyer. It’s called “All The Promises of the Bible.” In it he refers to a school teacher named Everet R. Storms of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. He was on his 28th time reading through the Bible and decided to write down every time God made a promise to a man. He discovered that God made 7,487 promises. And that means that nearly 25 per cent of the Bible contain the promises God made to people.

So, what is a promise? “It’s a declaration, verbal or written, of some benefit offered by one person to another person.”

Everyone everywhere uses promises every day. And folks, it you don’t believe *God’s* promises, something happens to those promises. Do you know what happens when you don’t believe them? Look again with me at Romans 4 and verse thirteen. Romans 4:13 *“For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. (14) For if they which are of the law be heirs,* ***faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect****…”*

So many people want God to do something for them. Or they want God to answer a prayer they’ve prayed. But, have they believed His promises? You see, you can make faith void; which means, make it empty of power when you lean on anything other than what the LORD says.

Who here thinks that God will supply your needs based upon your keeping of His laws? Who here thinks God will take you into heaven someday if you just “try your best”? Who here thinks that your prayers will be answered just because you’ve prayed?

You see, God *does* want us to keep His laws. He *does* want us to do all we do with whole-heartedly. Colossians 3:23 *“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;…”*

He *does* want to answer our prayers. But in His world, He’s calling out men and women to believe Him and to count on His promises. There’s no real relationship with God except one in which we believe His word.

So, why did the LORD send to the human race 7,487 promises? So that we could live a life of faith and not sight. II Corinthians 5:7 *“For we walk by faith, not by sight…”*

Folks, all of the LORD’s promises are absolute. They are true. And they can be trusted.

First, why did the LORD make promises?

Second, when you live by faith, you live by grace; verse sixteen. Romans 4:16*“Therefore it is of faith,* ***that it might be by grace****; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, …”*

God’s salvation is free to all. But the only way His grace can accomplish that salvation in a human soul is when he or she exercises faith. Ephesians 2:8 *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

Folks, when it comes to God’s salvation, grace is the source, faith is the channel, and salvation is the effect. How many times did you read in the Gospels when Jesus offered healing to people did He say a word about faith?

Here are just a few.

Mark 2:1 *“And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. (2) And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. (3) And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.*

*(4) And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. (5)* ***When Jesus saw their faith****, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”*

Mark 4:36 *“And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. (37) And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.*

*(38) And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? (39) And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. (40) And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful?* ***how is it that ye have no faith?****”*

Mark 5:25 *“And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, (26) And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, (27) When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment.*

*(28) For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. (29) And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. (30) And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?*

*(31) And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? (32) And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. (33) But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.*

*(34) And he said unto her, Daughter,* ***thy faith hath made thee whole****; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.”*

Mark 10:46 *“And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. (47)* *And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.*

*(48) And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. (49) And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. (50) And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.*

*(51) And Jesus answered and said unto him, what wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. (52) And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way;* ***thy faith hath made thee whole****. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.”*

Folks, the way life works in God’s world is by grace through faith. Romans 5:1 *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: (2) By whom also* ***we have access by faith into this grace*** *wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”*

First, why did the LORD make promises?

Second, when you live by faith, you live by grace

Third, do not stagger at God’s promises through unbelief; verse seventeen. Romans 4:17 “*(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. (18) Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.*

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*(21)* *And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (22) And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.”*

Folks, with nearly 25 per cent of your Bible filled with God’s promises, what is it that causes you to stagger through unbelief at God’s promises? To stagger means “to vacillate” and “to walk with unsteadiness, as one who is drunk with alcohol.”

Why do you waver and doubt the LORD? Only you can answer that question. God is true. His Word is reliable. He will do what He says He will do.

And the evidence of staggering is unbelief. Christians are the Believers. If any, we are the ones who have no reason to ever stagger at God’s promises.

Let me conclude with these promises. As you look at each one, ask yourself if you believe it.

**Salvation**. Romans 6:23 *“**For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

**Rest**. Matthew 11:28-29 *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”*

**Every need met**. Philippians 4:19 *“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*

**Strength to face temptation**. I Corinthians 10:13 *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”*

**Cleansing from all unrighteousness**. I John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

**Deliverance from trouble**. Psalm 50:15 *“And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”*

**That God will never forsake you**. Hebrews 13:5 *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”*

**And grace for anything you face**. II Corinthians 12:9 *“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”*

So here’s your “to do” responsibility for this week. Begin looking for God’s promises as you do your daily Bible reading. And put each promise in a notebook. Then, as you review each one, ask God to fulfill it as He has promised.

And think about what’s happening in your life that makes it so that you need one of His promises today? Is it inside your home? Is it at your job? Is it at school? What is it that the LORD is speaking to you about today that you know you simply need to believe one of His promises?

So, remember, big promises, big God.

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 410 “Standing On The Promises”