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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

Today we’re talking about God’s promises. As you know there has been a lot said about Promise Keepers in the last few years. People often ask me what I think about Promise Keepers. Any movement that brings men together and encourages them to keep their promises to God and their promises to their families, anytime you concentrate on keeping promises whether you are a man or you’re a woman, you are being godly. God is the original Promise Maker and God is the original Promise Keeper. Tonight I’m going to talk about how God made a promise to Abraham and although it was not fulfilled for many years, it was finally fulfilled.

I. GOD’S PROMISE FORETOLD

The first thing we are going to talk about is God’s promise foretold. He made a promise to Abraham and of course at that time his name was still Abram.

Genesis 15:1-6. “After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’ But Abram said, ‘Oh, sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘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.’ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”

This is one of the most important verses in the Old Testament. This was God’s promise foretold. He said, “Abraham, I’m going to make of you and your family a great nation! Abraham, you’re going to have so many grandchildren and so many great grandchildren and so many great, great grandchildren and so many descendants that they are going to outnumber the stars in the sky.”

Have you ever stood outside on a clear night and looked up into the heavens and tried to number the stars? For many centuries, even scientific men thought that there were a set number of stars, and for many centuries astronomers without the aid of a telescope tried to count them thinking they were close and thinking there was a certain number of them. You can even read in some of the pre-scientific age writings about the numbers of stars. Someone said there were 12,916 stars someone else, perhaps, who was either looking on a clearer night or had better vision said there are 14,960 stars. There was a debate among the scientific community before the telescope as to how many stars there were. Of course, when Galileo invented a crude telescope and begin to look into the heavens, they began to realize there were stars where they could not see stars before. The stronger the telescopes got the more man realized there are more and more stars out there. Today, astronomers believe the number of stars is innumerable. There is just no number. The farther out in the universe you get, the more stars there are. As some believe our universe is ever expanding. Well whatever you think, I want you to understand the Bible says God has measured the heavens with the span of his hand. No matter how large the universe gets our God is always bigger and always greater!

God said, "Abraham, count the stars if you can and you can but the number of stars you see just begins to tell you how many descendants you are going to have." God said to Abraham, "I am your shield" which means, "I'm going to protect you!" He also said "I am your reward." In other words, God says, "I am your protector and I am your provider. You just trust me and trust my promise!" Look again at verse 6 as I have said this is one of the most important verses in the Old Testament. "Abram believed the Lord!" He didn't have any evidence, he didn't have any reason to believe; he was an old man at this time with no children and his wife was barren as far as he knew, yet he believed the word of God! And God credited him righteousness for that sake.

God does the same thing to you and to me. If we will simply believe the promises of God. God says, "If you believe me, I credit righteousness to you." That word *credit* is actually an accounting word. A CPA knows what it means to have a debit side and a credit side or a liability and an asset. When you look on our liability side as individuals, you see a long list of all of our sins and weaknesses and shortcomings and imperfections. We've all got a long list! But when we simply believe the word of God, he says, "Okay. Over here on your credit side I'm going to write this. I'm going to write 'the righteousness of Jesus Christ and I'm going to credit it to your account!'"

One of the greatest verses in the New Testament is in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "and he [Jesus] who knew no sin became sin for us that in him we might be made the righteousness of God." On the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ took my liability side of the ledger—all of my sins and my imperfections—and he took all of yours and suddenly he bore those sins. ALL of my sins and your sins were credited to the account of Jesus Christ and when he died, he took my sins and he took your sins. If we just trust him and we just believe him if we believe the promise of God the way Abraham did do you know what God does? He writes on your account, "The righteousness of Jesus Christ." Isn't that a wonderful exchange? All you do is believe and God credits righteousness to your account. That was the promise foretold.

II. GOD'S PROMISE FRUSTRATED

Second, let's talk about the promise frustrated.

Genesis 16:1-6. "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; so she said to Abram. 'The Lord has kept me from having children. 'The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her. Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, 'You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me.' 'Your servant is in your hands,' Abram said. 'Do with her whatever you think best.' Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her."

This is God's promise frustrated. God said, "Abraham, you're going to have kids! You're going to have grandkids, great grandchildren. You're going to have more descendants than the stars of

the sky.” Abram said, Great, Lord! I believe that! And he waited and he waited and he waited and nothing happened. So Sarai said, “Well, God, apparently you can’t keep your promise! So, we’re going to help you along a little bit with your promise. She used reason to figure out a way to help God keep his promise. I want you to know what she did was legally acceptable. She did not break any laws of the land. I hope you understand not everything legal is moral! What she did was logical, but have you learned that not everything that is logical is right? Even though it was logical and even though it was legal it was not right nor was it moral.

I want to stop for a moment and talk about this Old Testament practice of having more than one wife. Was that ever God’s plan? You read in the Old Testament about all these men having lots of wives. David had many wives. The Bible says Solomon had 1,000 wives and Solomon was the one who said, “Whosoever finds a wife finds a good thing.” I call that too much of a good thing. The worst thing about 1,000 wives was 1,000 mothers-in-law. How did God really feel about those wives? We see it in the Garden of Eden. God’s perfect plan is seen in Eden when there was one man—Adam, and God created one wife for him—Eve. I want you to know that was God’s plan for all time: One woman for one man for all time. God never changed that. God never improved on that. It was never God’s plan for a man to have more than one wife. Who was the first man in the Bible recorded as having more than one wife? Lamech, the father of Noah. (Genesis, 4:11) He took two wives. Don’t you remember the Bible says that was when mankind was at its evil worst? It was never God’s plan for Lamech to have more than one wife. It was never God’s plan for Abraham to have any wife other than Sarai. This was “flesh above faith!”

When it comes to receiving God’s promises, you’ll either receive them by faith or you’ll try to get the flesh in there and you’ll try to make it happen. When God makes a promise, you don’t have to make it happen he’s going to make it happen. The mistake Abraham and Sarai made is to say, “Hey! God promised us children we’re not having children so, we have to do something about it!” So Abraham slept with Hagar and she became pregnant. Then Sarah began to regret what she had done and then not only did she regret what she did, she was repulsed by the idea and she came to Abraham and she said, “I gave her into your arms and now she’s pregnant and she despises me and what am I going to do?” I want you to see what it says in verse 6. “Then, Sarai mistreated” that Hebrew word literally means “whipped.” It’s a word used elsewhere in the Old Testament of beating an animal. It’s the same word that spoke of Balaam beating his donkey. Sarai became so repulsed by her fleshly decision, that she beating Hagar while she is pregnant! Poor, pregnant Hagar has to run out into the desert and God sent an angel to bring her back. God’s promise is frustrated, because they tried to help God along. When God makes a promise to you, be careful that you don’t mess it up!

III. GOD’S PROMISE FORGOTTEN

Here’s the third thing: God’s promise was forgotten. Sometimes when God makes a promise to you, you believe it for awhile, maybe you make the mistake of trying to make it happen and then if you go long enough, you just basically forget about it. It’s clear that whether or not Abraham totally forgot it he began to live as if the promise would never be fulfilled. Abram was 86 when Hagar bore Ishmael. From the very start when Ishmael was born, I think both Abram and Sarai both knew they had made a mistake so, here they are still waiting.

Genesis 17:1-5. "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am Lord God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant with you and will greatly increase your numbers.' Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.'"

Can you imagine waiting on a promise for thirteen years? Actually if you remember last week when we were talking about God's first calling Abraham, he made the same promise twenty-five years earlier. How many of you can remember details of your life twenty-five years ago? After thirteen years nothing happening, Abraham is just wondering, "Lord, I guess it's not going to happen." God repeated the covenant because it's as if Abraham is no longer walking in faith because he says, "Now, I want you to walk before me blameless. I need to confirm it and repeat it to you!" Do you remember that I told you that the name, Abram, means "high father," it could have even meant "tall father" but he said, "I'm going to make you the father of a multitude. That's what Abraham means, "the father of a multitude." So Abram has his name changed to Abraham and the change of his name represents a change of his character. There was a time in his life when Abram said, "I've just forgotten about all of these promises! But now I want to change and I want to recommit myself to God."

In chapter 17:17-18, God says, "Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?' And Abraham said to God, 'If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!'"

God says, "You're going to have kids—you're going to have *lots* of kids—more kids and descendants than the stars in the sky and you're going to have a son." Even at this stage in his life, Abraham is laughing about it! "Lord, are you sure you know what you are talking about? I'm 99 years old I'm almost a hundred years old. Sarah is 90 years old. Are you sure you want to do it this way, God? Wait a minute, God is there any chance any chance now that you can still bless Ishmael?" "Nope I'm going to do it in a way where I get all the credit." Now we don't have time to read it, but in chapter 18 God sends three visitors. Two are angels and one of them is the angel of the Lord which is a pre-incarnate personage of the Lord Jesus and they announced it once again "You're going to have this son."

Look at chapter 18:11. "Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing." That's very important! I want you to understand that this was not a natural miracle. This was a supernatural miracle! There was a lady in one of my former churches named Miss Edna. She was 96 when she died. She was a godly woman and as sharp as a tack! She used to like to talk about this story. She said, "Can you imagine somebody my age having a baby?" Then she would laugh and laugh! On her 96th birthday, somebody asked her what the best thing was about turning 96. She said, "No peer pressure!" The Bible says very clearly she was past the age of childbearing. "So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, 'after I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure? Then, the Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child now that I am this old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.' Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, 'I did not laugh.' But he said, 'Yes, you

did laugh." (Genesis 18:12-15)

IV. GOD'S PROMISE FULFILLED

God made the promise 25 years earlier and for 13 years they had not heard from the Lord and when God finally comes back, they laugh about it! "Yeah! sure!" Has it ever seemed to you that God is just not fulfilling his promise? You just need to give him some time because the fourth thing we see is God's promise fulfilled.

Genesis 21:1-2. "Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him."

Isaac means "laughter." What a beautiful name? Every time little Isaac was called to supper Sarah would say, "Laughter come here C'mon laughter, let's go!" Because they laughed at God's promise, they named him Isaac. "When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son, Isaac, was born to him. Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.' And she added, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.'" (Genesis 21:4-7)

I think if Abraham had been about seventy-five and Sarah had been about sixty-five people would have looked at a child born to them at that age and said, "You know that's kind of unusual but not all that unusual. That's possible." Maybe if Abraham had been eighty and Sarah had been seventy and they had a child, people would have looked at that and said, "That's REAL strange! But probably not impossible." But when he was hundred and she was ninety, everybody looked at that and said, "Listen! She ought to be a great, great grandmother and now she's a momma! That has to be from God." Have you ever learned that God always does things in a way and in a timing that brings him and him alone the honor and glory? And God kept his promise.

Lesson #1: God is not in a hurry

Here's the lesson to learn. Number one, God is not in a hurry! So don't you get in a hurry! With God one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like one day. When God makes a promise, don't look at your watch. When God makes a promise, don't look at your calendar. When God makes a promise, just look at God because he is never in a hurry. Just trust him!

Lesson #2: God always keeps his word

Lesson 2, God always keeps his word. God never retracts a statement! As I said at the beginning of this message, he is the original "promise keeper!" Years ago in English society, the title "Gentleman" was given to a certain kind of man. Very few men attained the title of "gentleman." A gentleman was a man who through many years of integrity and honesty was a man who was known by everybody as a man who *always* kept his word! Today we have polluted the word gentleman. To us it just means any male. "Ladies and gentlemen!" You know God is a

gentleman. God *always* keeps his word! When God makes a promise to you, he does not retract it.

Lesson #3: If you deviate from God’s plan, you must deal with the consequences

If you deviate from God’s plan like Abraham and Sarah did with Hagar and Ishmael, you must deal with the consequences. Newton’s Third Law of Physics says “For every action there is an opposite and equal reaction.” Did you know that is also true in the spiritual realm? For everything you do there is always an opposite and equal consequence. For those good choices you make there are good consequences but for those poor choices you make there are poor consequences! 4,000 years later in the Middle East today, the Palestinians, the descendants of Ishmael and the Israelis, the descendants of Isaac are still fighting and killing each other! All because Sarah and Abraham tried to hurry God’s plan along. When you deviate, you have to deal with the consequences.

Lesson #4: Learn the value of waiting on God

Number four, learn the value of waiting on God. Abraham received this promise 25 years earlier and then 25 years later God honored his promise to Abraham. We need to learn the value of waiting. Isaiah 40 says, “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.” Do you think that means sitting still and twiddling your thumbs? Sitting down and passively doing nothing is that what it means to wait on the Lord? No that phrase, “They that wait upon the Lord” is like a server in a restaurant. “May I help you?” “May I serve you?” “Do you need something else?” “Is everything okay?” When you wait on the Lord, it is an *active* process of saying, “God, how can I serve you?” “How can I please you?” “How can I help you?” but you are not trying to get ahead of God you are waiting on his promise.

This was God’s promise to Abraham. What are his promises to you? “My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory through Christ Jesus.” That’s a promise and God does not lie! “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” That’s a promise of God. He does not lie! This book is full of promises. Claim them, make them your own and wait on God’s timing and he will always bring it to pass.

OUTLINE

I. GOD’S PROMISE FORETOLD

II. GOD’S PROMISE FRUSTRATED

III. GOD’S PROMISE FORGOTTEN

IV. GOD’S PROMISE FULFILLED

Lessons learned:

1. God is not in a hurry
2. God always keeps his word
3. If you deviate from God’s plan, you must deal with the consequences
4. Learn the value of waiting on God