

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: God's Promises

Lesson: Romans 4:20-21

²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

(Slide 1) We make many promises in our everyday lives. Some promises are kept, but many are not. As the new year approaches, we often make resolutions and promises to ourselves. For example, many people make promises like, "I'll start exercising regularly." This was also one of my resolutions. A few years ago, I used to exercise almost every day, but I've found it very difficult to start again after stopping. Even though there's a fitness center in my neighborhood, and I'm registered there and pay a monthly fee, I feel like I'm donating money as I rarely use it.

"I'll start my diet tomorrow." This is also one of the promises people make to themselves but often struggle to keep. We often say to others, "I'll start my diet tomorrow," but it's easy to find ourselves with donuts, cookies, bacon, and more the very next day. Then we say to people, "I said I will start my diet tomorrow, not today!" Tomorrow never seems to come for those who have declared they will go on a diet.

When my wife and I were in California, it was only a five-hour drive to Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon. However, we always thought we would have the opportunity to go to Las Vegas someday, so we kept postponing the trip. We always said, "Let's go to Las Vegas next year." However, that next year never came for us to visit Las Vegas, and we moved to Wisconsin, still having not gone to Las Vegas.

In addition, we make promises to ourselves every day, as well as to our families, friends, or colleagues. Some of these promises are kept, but some are not. When promises are not kept, we initially feel disappointed.

However, as these situations repeat themselves, we no longer have high expectations for promises. We lose trust in promises.

In our lives, promises may often lose their significance, but there was one who held steadfast to God's promises, waiting with hope and expectation. His name was Abraham.

(Slide 2) Today's scripture lesson says: “²⁰ Yet he (Abraham) did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”

Abraham and his wife Sarah lived a fulfilled life in their hometown, even though they were childless due to Sarah's infertility. Rather than complaining, they lived gratefully, trusting in God. When Abraham turned 75, God appeared to him and instructed him to leave his homeland and journey to a land that God would show. God promised Abraham that in this new land, he would become a great nation, and his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

In physics, there's a concept called inertia, which refers to the resistance of an object to changes in its state of motion or rest when acted upon by external forces. Inertia applies not only to objects but also to us. One example is that many people are resistant to "change." In other words, a lot of people tend to prefer sticking to traditions and habits.

Abraham had already lived for 75 years in his homeland. His homeland held deep significance for him, filled with cherished memories. When God instructed him to leave that place and go where God would lead, it wouldn't have been an easy decision for him to leave his homeland. However, he followed God's command because, to him, God's guidance was more important than his attachment to his homeland.

Abraham left his homeland as per God's word, but God's promise to him didn't come true right away. It took a considerable amount of time for the promise to be fulfilled. When Abraham and Sarah departed, Abraham

was 75 and Sarah was 65. Despite God's assurance of children, they remained childless after one, five, and even ten years. How long did they wait? Until Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90.

What's important here is that Abraham didn't lose hope or feel disappointed simply because God's promise didn't come true right away. He always held onto hope and expectation, believing that God would fulfill the promise in His own time, as he had firm faith that God always keeps His promises. He lived each day faithfully, firmly trusting in God's promises and following His word without wavering.

(Slide 3) Some people may find it difficult to believe that Abraham had a child at the age of 100 and Sarah at 90, leading them to attempt to interpret this metaphorically. However, Romans 4:19 states: “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.”

Their bodies were no longer able to bear a child. However, God is the one who always fulfills what He promises. No one could have imagined that Abraham and Sarah would have a child. But when God promised them a child, and they lived in firm belief of that promise, it was not by their own ability, but by the grace of God, that they were blessed with a child.

Friends, the God we believe in is the God who faithfully keeps His promises. Do you believe this?

During this Lenten season, we are focusing on prayer. In the last Sunday worship service, during the young people’s time, I asked the children and you all what prayer is. Some answered that prayer is a conversation with God. So, if asked, what is the purpose of prayer, what would you say? Why do you pray? What do you pray for?

(Slide 4) We sometimes view prayer as a sort of magic stick, turning to God to fulfill our needs when we lack something. And if our prayers go

unanswered, we may feel disappointed, even to the point of no longer attending church.

We might think that when we pray, everything should be fulfilled, but that's a misunderstanding of prayer.

Abraham followed God's word and left his homeland. This decision led him from a life of financial stability and security to one filled with uncertainty. Abraham's faith made life more difficult for him. Moreover, he did not immediately have a child after leaving his homeland. However, he did not lose faith in God, but continued to hope and trust in God's promises. And after 25 years of training, when his life aligned with God's will, God's promise was fulfilled in his life.

The reason we pray and its purpose is to align our lives with God's will.

Friends, How do you pray? While some might say prayer is communication with God, are you solely asking God for your needs? When you close your eyes to pray, try not to open them right after. Take a moment in silence, sensing what God might be speaking to you, what thoughts come to mind. This will shift our prayer and faith mindset.

In any circumstance, what we need to hold onto is God's promises. Our God is faithful to fulfill His promises, regardless of the situation we may face, once He has determined to do so. Remember how old Abraham and Sarah were when they had a child: 100 and 90.

I pray that, like Abraham, you all will hold firmly to God's promises towards you with hope and expectation, without losing faith, until the end. Amen.