

Promises Fulfilled

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- [0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we pray that we come with open minds and humble hearts now to receive your word today and be transformed by it. In Jesus' name, amen.
- So working at my old job, one of the things that I got really good at working at this job, what I got really good at was never making a promise. Never making a promise.
- Well, my job was to write opinions on how much tax someone would have to pay. But we could never promise that this would definitely happen. Instead, we'd write something like this.
- Let's put it on the screen. This is what we would write in our opinions. Based on the information you provided, the tax consequences should be blah, blah, blah. Because if we made a concrete promise and then we got it wrong, things could go bad for us.
- We could get sued. I could even lose my job. But the sad thing is, is that this attitude has crept into everything that I do. So now I just can't commit to anything anymore.
- [1 : 04] Let's catch up around 10-ish. That should be fine. I just need to check. That might be okay. Yeah, I'll try and make it. Yeah, I'll see how I go. I'll get back to you.
- On Facebook, I'll say I'm interested. Devin's interested. Or maybe. And this is the thing, right? I feel I can't promise a lot because a lot of the time I'll bail or I'll be late.
- I just can't be bothered sometimes. What I've found is that for many reasons, mostly due to my own selfishness, I just cannot deliver on my promises.
- This is just who we are as human beings, aren't we? In many ways, we just cannot be trusted. Because of our limitations and our sinfulness, we just seem to fail. We fail hard and we fail often at keeping our word.
- But today we're going to see a God who always delivers on his promises. God always keeps his promises. And this is actually our greatest assurance, especially when life is so uncertain.
- [2 : 04] So today we're going to see three things. One, that God fulfills his promises despite human impossibility. Two, that he does it despite human failure. And three, that his promises extend even to outsiders.
- So point one, you can follow along on the outlines. God fulfills his promises despite human impossibility. See, back in Genesis 17 and 18, God made a promise.
- God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son. And through this son, God would bring forth his people. A great nation with whom God would establish his covenant with. Sounds great, doesn't it?
- Sounds good. But there's only one problem with that. See, Abraham and Sarah are old. And I mean really, really old. Alright? So Abraham is 90.
- Sarah, oh, sorry. Abraham is 99. Sarah is 90. So how could they have a kid? How could they do it? I was thinking about this the other day, actually, because I was in Sydney with my grandparents last weekend.

- [3 : 05] And I just imagine in my head them sitting me down with some very special news. Hey, Devina. We have some very special news for you.
- We are going to have a baby. What? And I'd just be like, are you out of my mind? Are you crazy? I would just freak out.
- God's promise sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? It defies human limitation. It's just such an impossible claim that Abraham and Sarah just can't help but laugh at it a few chapters earlier.
- It sounded as crazy to them as it does to us today. And at this point in the story, it's been about 25 years since God first made his promise to Abraham. And 25 years is a long time to wait.
- You know, they might have just written it off that it's not going to happen after 25 years. And with each passing day of those 25 years, the promise must have seemed more and more unlikely.
- [4 : 05] But in spite of all this, God is gracious to Abraham and Sarah. He keeps his promise here. Look at verses 1 to 4. Of chapter 21. And as I read it, see if you can spot the emphasis in this passage.
- All right? 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.
- Do you see the emphasis here? Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. And when his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him as God commanded him. See, as miraculous as this birth is, and it's amazing, it shouldn't be unexpected, should it?
- It is exactly as God had said. God's commitment to his word is front and center here. He does not fail on his promises despite human impossibility.
- Even when they thought that this promise was dead, God was still in total control. God delivers on his promises at the appointed time just the way that he planned it.
- [5 : 13] Verse 2 says that Sarah bore a son to Abraham in his old age. And verse 5 says that Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. It just shows the power of God to keep his promises, doesn't it?
- I can't even be trusted to make it to church on time. This is the God who causes a birth to an 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman. God's promises are truly unstoppable.
- And this should lead to joy, shouldn't it? Because God keeps his word in every situation, even in the impossible, he can be trusted in every situation. And that is good news for us.
- Look at verses 6-7. 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've borne him a son in his old age. See, God has brought Sarah full circle here. Where before she laughed at unbelief at God's ridiculous promise, now she laughs out of joy.
- [6 : 16] She explodes in gratitude for God's faithfulness and his provision here. The name Isaac even means laughter, which would serve as a daily reminder to them that God is able to turn Sarah's unbelief into joy.
- God always gets the last laugh, doesn't he? All right, so we've seen here that God fulfills his promises despite human impossibility, which brings us to point two, that God fulfills his promises despite human failure.
- So Isaac grew and he was weaned, and to celebrate his safe arrival as an infant, they hold a huge feast. And it just seems like things are just right, aren't they?

God has finally brought joy and peace to Abraham's family. But this picture of perfection that we see here, it only lasts for a second. Lo and behold, it doesn't take long for this joy to just vanish.

This time because of human sin and failure. Follow along at verses 9 to 10. So Ishmael mocks Isaac.

[7 : 34] And now this mocking here, it's not some, you know, cute little poke on Facebook or something. No, this is serious. This is malicious. Ishmael wants to deeply insult and humiliate Isaac here, probably out of jealousy.

Because if you think about it, up to this point, Ishmael has been the only child of the family for the first 14 years of his life. And look, I kind of get it, right?

I'm an only child myself. And us only children, you've got to understand this, we love the attention. We don't like to share. Growing up, I never wanted brothers and sisters.

See, I wanted all the attention for myself. I wanted all the glory for me. So now comes along this spoiled, this annoying child of promise.

I kind of feel for poor Ishmael here. See, from receiving all the attention, now he lives in the shadow of this promised child. And so he just insults Isaac. But Sarah doesn't exactly cover herself in glory either, does she?

[8 : 36] She rages. She acts impulsively. She demands that Hagar and Ishmael be thrown out. And if you think about it, this conflict between Ishmael and Isaac, it's her fault anyway, isn't it?

I mean, in Genesis 16, Sarah can't bear children. So she tells Abraham to make babies with the Egyptian slave instead. All because she didn't believe that God could fulfill his promise to her.

So once again, God's promises are placed under threat. This time because of human failure. And in the previous chapters, we've seen how this isn't the first time Abraham and Sarah act out of unbelief.

I mean, Abraham has already pawned Sarah off twice as his sister to Pharaoh and to King Abimelech because he feared for his life. He risked losing Sarah forever just because he was scared of these two men.

So because of this, Abraham's family is completely divided. Once more, human beings have placed God's promises into jeopardy.

[9 : 39] But again, God is faithful to his word. Where humans have failed, God intervenes. Look at verses 11 to 13. The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.

But God said to him, do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you. Because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

I will make the son of a slave into a nation also because he is your offspring. So God reassures Abraham that things are going to be okay. He will still fulfill his promises despite human failure.

God is constantly taking our sin and working it for our good. Not that this gives us license to sin or do what we want. But we know that even our most sinful, even our most destructive actions cannot stop God from accomplishing his purposes in this world.

And the amazing thing here is that God will not only fulfill his plans for Isaac, but he's going to do it for Ishmael too. Which brings us to point three, that God fulfills his promises even for outsiders.

[10 : 50] See, this is not the first time that Abraham's family has been divided like this. In Genesis 16, Sarah gets really jealous at Hagar. It's Hagar, not Sarah, who was the one that bore Abraham a child.

So Sarah just lashes out at her and Hagar is forced to run away from home. But God comforts Hagar, this Egyptian slave. He promises her that her son Ishmael will have a multitude of descendants.

God promises to bless Ishmael and turn him into a great nation too. And in verse 13, this is God reaffirming that promise. He says, Isn't this amazing?

See, as humans, we tend to see in terms of winners and losers really clear categories. Isaac, he's the promised child. He's the winner. He's a great guy.

Ishmael, on the other hand, he's just the son of an Egyptian slave. What a loser. He's the outsider. But God's promises extend beyond this small view of blessing.

[12 : 00] No, our God is not just the God of the Jews, but he's the God of the whole world. He cares for those outside of his covenant. He desires this whole world to know him and live under his great promises.

So Abraham trusts God's promises and sends Hagar and Ishmael on their way. But before too long, the little water they're carrying with them, it runs out. They're completely lost in the desert here.

And Ishmael begins to starve. Again, God's promises seem in jeopardy, don't they? We've just heard how God had promised to turn Ishmael into this great nation. But how will that happen if he dies out here in the desert?

So once again, will God keep his promise? Hagar doesn't seem to think so. She abandons her child. She can't bear to watch her son die before her very eyes.

You can just imagine a mother's pain here, can't you? This kid, he's as good as dead. But as always, God remains faithful. He delivers on his promise.

[13 : 04] Even in the midst of impending death here. Check out verses 17 to 18. God hears the boy and he assures Hagar that he's heard Ishmael crying as he lies there in the desert.

See, where they are lost and they are stranded in this desert, God seeks them out. He has compassion and he hears those whom he makes promises to.

And he will protect his promise here by saving Ishmael so that he will become a great nation. Even though Ishmael isn't the child of promise, God still has plans for him and will protect him by his grace.

Look at verse 19. Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. And it says in verse 20 that God was with the boy as he grew up.

So we know that God continued to be faithful to his promise, even beyond the scope of this narrative. Okay, so we've seen how God's promises extend even to this outsider Ishmael.

[14 : 23] And now we're going to see how God's promises extend even to a pagan king, Abimelech. You may remember God's promise to Abraham back in Genesis chapter 12.

And it's on the slide. God says to Abraham, And we see this promise, the outworking of this promise firsthand here with King Abimelech.

You may remember Adam's talk a few weeks ago on the previous chapter, Genesis 20, where Abraham lied to Abimelech that Sarah was actually his sister and not his wife.

But before Abimelech had a chance to sleep with Sarah and take her, God comes to Abimelech in a dream and warns him that if he doesn't return Sarah to Abraham, that he's going to die.

God even kept Abimelech's family from having children because he almost slept with Sarah. And it's only through Abraham praying to God that Abimelech lives and can bear children again.

[15 : 37] So we get a picture here of why Abimelech was so burnt by his past experience, his past dealing with Abraham. God is really here fulfilling on his promise, isn't he?

He's making good on his promise to curse those who dishonor Abraham. So now Abimelech comes to Abraham, not as a king, but in complete humility, asking Abraham to deal kindly with him.

Look at verses 22 to 23. At that time, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his officers, said to Abraham, God is with you in everything you do.

Now swear to me here that before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me in the country where you now reside as a foreigner the same kindness I have shown to you.

Okay. So this is the question. Why would powerful King Abimelech come to Abraham, who's a nobody? Why would he come to him like this? It's because Abimelech knows that God is with Abraham in everything he does.

[16 : 45] God delivers on his promises here by being powerfully present with Abraham. And doesn't this passage just highlight Abimelech's fear of God? Abimelech gets it, doesn't he?

He understands that God is blessing Abraham. And so he wants to share in that blessing too. He wants Abraham to treat him kindly just as God treated Abraham kindly.

It's kind of ironic, isn't it, that this pagan king seems to understand God's promises better than Abraham himself. There's nothing special about Abraham. The guy's 100 years old.

He's not a king. So isn't it funny when a king and his commanding officer come to Abraham asking him for kindness? It's kind of like, you know, Batman or Christian Bale rocking up to the front of your house and asking you for help.

Batman, you need my help? Bale, you need my help? What's... I know I've been hitting the gym a couple of times, but really? You need my help? It just sounds crazy, doesn't it? See, Abimelech may have all the firepower, but he understands that God is with Abraham.

[17 : 53] And because the God who created the universe is with Abraham, he is more powerful, he is more dangerous than any nuclear warhead Abimelech may have up his sleeve.

You can just hear the fear in Abimelech's voice, can't you, in verse 25 to 26. Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized.

But Abimelech said, I don't know who's done this. You did not tell me. I heard about it only today. See, for a powerful king, Abimelech knows who really has the power here. The one whom with God is, is with.

We're also getting a glimpse of how God is starting to turn Abraham into a great nation. Think about it. Abimelech is a king, but he wants to make a covenant with Abraham and so treats Abraham like a king too, as truly the leader of a great nation.

So Abraham provides sheep and cattle to swear this covenant, but also to declare that the well is his. And this well marks the beginning of Abraham's growth in territory as a great nation.

[19 : 01] So we see here God's promises extending to outsiders, that although God has made this promise to Abraham, Abimelech is the one who shares in this blessing.

He gets the benefit of it too, doesn't he? See, God has promised that all people on earth would be blessed by Abraham. Not just the Jews, but also through this pagan king.

God's intention was for the whole world to know him and be able to share in Abraham's blessing and so be blessed by God too. And in verse 33, Abraham then plants a tree at Bathsheba where God was once more faithful to his promises.

And there Abraham calls on the name of the Lord, the eternal, the everlasting God. It was here where God's promises even extended to bless a pagan king.

Right, so we've seen how God has fulfilled his promises despite human impossibility, despite human failure, and it's even extended to those on the outside. We've seen the grace and the power of God in providing Isaac, in saving Ishmael and even blessing Abimelech here.

[20 : 13] But as good as these things are, and they are great, they're great. They represent only a partial fulfillment of God's promises. They are only a shadow.

They are only a hint of the promise that was to come, the fulfillment of that promise. There would come a much greater fulfillment of all these promises. On the slide, 2 Corinthians 1, verse 20 says, For no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ.

See, it is Christ who stands as the ultimate fulfillment of all promises made to us in God. And all promises that have been made to Abraham have found their fulfillment in Jesus.

You also remember from our second reading in Ephesians 1, verse 3, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Every blessing from God has found its fulfillment in the person and the work of Jesus. See, through Christ, God fulfilled his promise of a son despite human impossibility.

[21 : 28] See, Christ comes as a descendant of Abraham, but not through natural conception, but through a miraculous birth from a virgin. And not only would he be a son of Abraham, but he would be the son of God.

And through this son, every nation on earth would be blessed, Jew and Gentile. So like Sarah now, we can explode with joy and gratitude for God's provision of his son.

And in Christ, God has also rescued us from human failure, where we have all sinned and rebelled against God. Jesus took the punishment for our sins and rose again so that we could receive the blessing of eternal life.

Through his son, God has taken our sin and turned it for our good. And in Christ, God has also fulfilled his promises to bless outsiders. We too, like Ishmael and Abimelech, we're outsiders.

We are Gentiles. Paul in Ephesians 2 says that we Gentiles, though, who were once not God's people, who were once far away from God, have now been brought near by the blood of Christ.

[22 : 34] See, on that cross, Jesus has reconciled us into relationship with the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, so that now we can share in this true blessing as God's people.

So we do not need to look any further than Jesus to know that God is completely faithful to his promises. In him, God is fulfilled and will fulfill every promise that he makes.

Do you see why Jesus is everything to us? So for those of you who have not yet placed your trust in Jesus, let me ask you this. How often have people let you down?

How often have you let yourself down? See, the only person you can trust with your life is Jesus. He was faithful for you all the way to the cross.

Jesus died so that we could be saved. And as we repent of our sins and place our trust in him, we can have the complete confidence that God will fulfill his promises.

[23 : 34] He will forgive us and grant us eternal life. And for those of us who have placed our trust in Jesus, I think we need to respond like a Bimelech here.

Many times I think we often tend to overlook the greatness of Jesus. Instead, you know, we place our trust in other things in the hope that they will satisfy us. So we place all of our hopes in a dream career or this dream marriage or this dream lifestyle that we've concocted for ourselves.

But what I've found is every time I get what I'm chasing for, it always ends in disappointment. None of these things are great enough to satisfy me completely.

So in the same way a Bimelech recognized Abraham's true greatness, we need to recognize Jesus' true greatness here and we trust him instead. Just like Abraham, Jesus came to earth without any land.

He didn't have any military power. Actually, the Son of Man had nowhere even to lay his head. But even though he appeared weak, he was truly great.

[24 : 43] Not only was God with Jesus in everything that he did, but he was God himself. And he demonstrated true greatness in enduring the cross, which would have the power to save us from the bondage of sin.

So now even when it seems like God isn't hearing us, even when it seems like we're asking him for stuff and we're not getting what we want, we can look to Jesus and know that he can satisfy me completely.

Listen to these blessings from our first reading in Ephesians 1. Just listen to these words. Made holy, blameless, adoption, sonship, redemption, forgiveness, hope.

All these things are already ours in Christ forever. Our lives are so uncertain, aren't they? And actually, thinking about the future, it terrifies me.

It terrifies me. What will happen to me? What will happen to those that I love? Will things go well for me? Or will things just crumble around me? Thinking about the future, it cripples me.

[25 : 59] See, amidst all of this uncertainty in my life, the only hope that I have is that God is faithful to his word and nothing can stop him from keeping his promises.

Other people, they will let us down. Money and health, they're going to fade. Our status and our reputation, they're going to vanish in an instant. The only constant we have is the everlasting God, who is always faithful to his word.

And because of that, we can trust him with everything. Let's pray now that we would. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a God who keeps his word, a God who is faithful.

And we know that nothing can stop you from keeping your promises. Not even human sinfulness or evil can stop you. And we thank you that you now have blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Help us to grow our trust in you, grow our affections for you, and keep reminding us that it is Christ alone who satisfies. In Jesus' great name.

[27 : 11] Amen.