

(Com)Promise: Promises vs. Competing Promises
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OT Reading: Genesis: 12:1-5

NT Reading: Ephesians 1:17-18

Before I begin, I want to tell you that I came up with the idea for this sermon from listening to a Bible study (First Five) last week. The woman speaking was talking about compromise and she pointed out that the word "Promise" is in the word compromise and her thought was maybe we should consider a compromise as settling for a competing promise vs. waiting for the promises of God. This really got me thinking about compromises I have made along my own journey of faith. I had to really ask myself why have there been times when I have chosen compromise or a competing promise over the promises of God. And this is a hard question, that I still am wrestling with and I hope after today you will be willing to explore this in your own life as well. I think only by exploring the reasons behind our decisions, can we start making different choices.

Please pray with me:

In today's OT passage we looked at a small glimpse of Abraham's life (known as Abram at the time). Many of you know that Abraham is often called the Father of Faith (Romans 4:16) and that both Judaism and Christianity look at him as an important religious figure. Today we are going to look at how Abraham chose to believe in God's promises and by trusting in God, he was able to walk by faith.

Abraham was a wealthy man who lived in Mesopotamian which was a center for culture and trade during his time, so perhaps it was a modern day NYC and we know from our current society that many places that are the center of trade and culture are not necessarily places that are focused on God. This would have been especially true at the time of Abraham, because in reality we are at the very beginning of God revealing himself to us, and his plan to save humanity. Basically God is an unknown entity to many, perhaps some people had heard about Noah, but the flood was probably considered ancient history, and we know as humans we tend to easily forget the past and the lessons it holds.

So at the start of Abraham journey, he is living in a city that doesn't know God, a city where people probably worshiped many Gods, as we knew was the custom of ancient times. Since he was wealthy, he probably was steeped in the society and was probably held in high regard. Like many of us today, we are going about our life we all of a sudden God shows up, and if we are willing to listen, he is asking us to follow him. So God shows and ask Abraham to leave his behind the life he knows and to follow him. Remember also, that the world was a much smaller place, and Abraham had probably spent his entire life within a few miles of his hometown. So what would motivate him to leave? What would motivate you to change the course of your life? For Abraham is was the promise of God.

God tells Abraham that if he follows Him, God will make him into a great nation and that he will bless Abraham and that Abraham's name will be a blessings to others. God was giving Abraham the promise of a legacy that

would NEVER end...and Abraham chose to follow God and we here in the building today are a fulfillment of that promise. We are God's people and we still to this day remember Abraham and talk about what he did: He truly is the father of our faith. He based his life on the promise of God and the Lord was faithful to fulfill that promise and he calls us to do the same.

If you look at Abraham's life you know that like many of us, he made compromises, he settled for less than God's best. For example when he first went into Egypt, he was worried that the Pharaoh would kill him in order to have his wife because she was beautiful. So rather than seeking God before facing this possible danger, he came up with his own plan and asked Sarah to lie and tell the Egyptians that she was his sister, which resulted in Sarah becoming a member of the Pharaoh's Harem. God of course rescues Sarah, but for a short time she was captive due to Abraham's compromise. And then of course there is his most famous compromise that he and Sarah made together when they got tired of waiting on God to fulfill his promise to bring them a son. As you probably know Abraham got his concubine pregnant and it caused all sorts of troubles that we still feel in today's world. Even though they compromised through their impatience, God was faithful to still fulfill his promise. The consequences weren't wiped away, but the promise was fulfilled.

Like Abraham, God has made promises to all of his children, that means you and me! The promises we find in the Bible are applicable to all of us, but there are also promises that are specific to us, and the calling God has placed on our lives. We are going to talk about a few of the promises of God,

but before we do, lets talk about where these compromises, or competing promises come from, because just like promises are given by God, competing promises also have a specific source, and that source is Satan.

I think in today's world, and even in our churches we have this belief that the devil isn't really working against us and that when we sin, it is because we simply were disobedient, now don't get me wrong here, the devil can't make you sin, but he sure will lead you down the road and whisper all sorts of promises in your ear to get you to turn away from God. If you are not aware of his tactics, or the areas you are weak in, you will easily fall prey to these competing promises...or in this case lies.

The Bible tells us that the devil is the father of lies, as compared to God who is the father of truth. We are also told in John 10:10 that the devil comes ONLY, to steal and kill and destroy and that Jesus comes to give us life to the fullest. 2 Timothy 2:25-26 tells us that the devil will snare us and hold us captive with his lies and that God will free us with his truth. Now I am not saying all of this to scare you or make you uncomfortable, but God has made it crystal clear that we have an enemy, an ACTIVE enemy in this world and that our struggle is not against the flesh but against spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:12) and that if we don't fully accept this, then I think we are all at risk for following the competing promises of the devil vs. the life fulfilling promises of God. And if you want to know more about how to win the battle and to fight against these lies, go ahead and read the book of Ephesians.

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Now I'm going to say something that might ruffle some feathers, but Jesus was a feather ruffler, so I hope you know that this is said with love. Some of you in here today, don't really have to worry about the devil coming after you, because many Christians today have no idea who they are in Christ, what God's promises are and the power that is within them and because you are unaware of what is promised you and because you don't tap into the Power within you, Satan doesn't mess with you because you are of no threat to him. I'm also not saying this to judge or condemn, because I have been there and there are points in my life, when I forget who I am, I don't rely on God and chose to follow lies rather than truth. When I do this the devil doesn't have to worry about me making problems for him.

Church we are only a threat to him, when we actively claim our rightful place in God's kingdom, when we stand on all the promises that come with that, when we refuse to compromise even when it's hard, because then and only then, like Abraham do we run the risk of having a lasting legacy that points others to God. Listen church, we need to intimately know who God says we are, we need to stand firm on what he says and actively claim the inheritance that is ours, the blessings that are ours, and promises that God has given us. Church when we wake up in the morning, we should be people that the devil is scared of, because he knows we are armed with the knowledge that our God is victorious, and that to mess with us, he has to go through HIM. We should be like the little kid on the playground who has all the confidence in the world to stand up to the bully, because he knows that his big brother, or dad is standing right behind him. That courage comes from knowing who has our back!

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Unlike Abraham who had to step out in faith with a God he had no track record with, a God without a written down history, we can step out in faith already knowing who God is and what he has promised. But in order to know what God has promised us we have to spend time in his word.

So let me briefly list some of the promises that God has made to you:

Jeremiah 29:13-14: When you seek him you will find him

James 1:5: You have access to God's wisdom

Jeremiah 31:3: You are tenderly loved by God

Hebrews 4:16: You are helped by God

John 15:16: You are chosen by Christ to bear fruit

Phil 4:19: Your needs are met by God

Phil 1:6: God will complete the good work he began in you

Eph 3:12: God tells you to approach him with boldness, freedom and confidence

Eph 1:19-20: God's power raised Jesus from the dead and that SAME power is in and working for you

Jeremiah 29:11 God has plans for you and they are the best plans out there for you

1 John 5:18: You are born of God and the evil one CANNOT touch you!
The amazing thing about the list I just read is that that is a SMALL sample of God's promises for you that can be found in scripture.

So you may be thinking: Great, I'm glad God has made all these promises, and I sort of believe that there is a spiritual battle going on around me, but what really happens when I compromise and don't rely on God's promises and that

is a great question so I want to share a quick story from the Bible that I heard recently:

Many of you may know of Joshua. He took over for Moses after he died and he is the one who walked around the walls of Jericho in order to defeat the city. Joshua was a man who sought out God and God was faithful to guide and direct Joshua and his army, but God had a few rules that he wanted them to follow. God basically said to them, I will help you defeat your enemies, however you are not to take any spoils of war. Meaning you are not allowed to take items of value after you defeat your enemies.

However, after the walls of Jericho fell a man names Achan took some of these items even though God has said not to. Now let's be honest, we've all been there...we see something we like or want and we take it even though we know it is not good for us. A simple example is maybe you watch a TV show or go to a movie that you know deep down God wouldn't approve of, and you believe the lie that putting these images in our heads won't hurt you. But that's simply not true, we know how a simple flirtation can ruin a marriage, we know how looking a pictures of photo shopped women can ruin a girls self esteem or give a young man a very distorted idea of what beauty is... when we open our minds to lies, we start to believe them.

Back to the story....So Achan sinned and this led to a defeat during the next battle Joshua and his men faced, which was very confusing for Joshua and after seeking God, he learned that someone had ignored God's word and Joshua was to find out who it was. Long story short, Joshua finally figured out that Achan had the stolen goods and ultimately Achan and his family

were put to death. Now I don't want to scare with the whole death thing, though I think it's valuable to look at the cost of sin, I want you to listen to this verse out of Joshua (7:21): *When I (Achan) saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.* Isn't it interesting where he put what he took? He didn't go around and show everyone, it wasn't something he couldn't be proud of, rather it was something that he hid away.

Achan chose to compromise, to follow a lie: he believed that taking those items wouldn't hurt anyone, that no body would ever know, that he deserved to have those items, maybe he believe this is how God would meet his needs, but the reality is when we get things our own way and ignore God's way we don't get to fully enjoy them. I mean Achan put the stolen items in the ground!! How do you enjoy a robe that is buried...you don't. Just like we don't enjoy things that we acquire outside of God's will. And here is the kicker of the story; after Achan and his family were put to death, God send Joshua and his men into another victorious battle and this time he let them keep all their enemies treasures...all Achan had to do was wait on God!

Maybe Achans story is a little to far removed for us, so let me give you a quick real life example of this: Maybe recently you have had an argument with a loved one, maybe a child, spouse, parent and during this argument you feel God telling you to walk away and cool off, but you know better, you are angry and you are going to bring up their mistake from the past, perhaps

something they regret, something that hurts them and when you do, you see that hurt in their eyes and they stop and walk away. For a brief second you feel vindicated or victorious, you have won the fight... but then you remember the look in their eyes and know that the words you just said cut deep and that the wound you just reopened will take a long time to heal...that's what it's like when we compromise....we have a quick moment of enjoyment, a rush of excitement followed quickly by regret. And by not walking away when God told you to, you will never realize the blessing you could have brought to your loved one.

I think often times, the most distracting compromises come right before God is about to fulfill a promise to us. We as humans get tired of waiting and even though time after time in scripture God tells us that he blesses those who wait, we chose to compromise and miss out on a bigger blessing. But please don't be dismayed because God also promises to bring beauty from our ashes, and to use what was meant to hurt us for our good. Don't forget Abraham and many others in the Bible got distracted and God put them back on track.

I'm going to end with this: I've recently been making some compromises in my life and the results are not something I enjoy. When I was choosing to make my own way, follow my own path, I sensed that there was something greater for me, that God is right now calling me to a better plan and that I like Abraham have to step out in faith to find that plan. Am I nervous - yes, am I a little scared -yes, but I know that God is trustworthy, because not only does my Bible tell me that, my history with God also tells me that. I'm

praying that God gives you and me the courage to grab hold of his promises, to hold tight to the inheritance that is yours through Jesus and to not get distracted by the compromises the enemy of our souls offers us.

Church open up your Bibles, find God's promises, read what he says is true about you, about himself and about your future and stand firmly on those. Remember he is your rock and though you might stumble you will not fall (Psalm 37:24). Let this lesson sink in, the devil will try to steal it from you as you leave this scared place. But remember God is living inside of you so you are a sacred place that the evil one cannot touch. Ask the Holy Spirit to let the lesson learned here sink deep into your heart so that your trust in God may grow.

Thanks for listening! In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit