

Conditional Promises

1. Review:
 - a. We have been learning about the Promises of God over these past few weeks.
 - i. The bible contains over 4000 promises of God toward His people.
 - ii. Faith:
 1. I hope that you are learning to look to God in the middle of your crisis instead of at the circumstances.
 2. When you look at God (who is greater than your circumstances) you are exercising faith.
 3. But when you look at your circumstances, you will doubt.
 - iii. God's Nature:
 1. He alone has the power to keep every one of His promises.
 2. He will not lie, He doesn't change His mind, He does not deceive us.
 3. He has made it clear in the Bible that He desires a relationship with you and I, but He will not force us to love Him. We can choose to reject Him and live a self-led life. But in so doing, we forfeit the benefits that come from an intimate relationship with the One who created us for Himself.
2. Of the over 4000 promises God has made, many have conditions attached to them.
 - a. Noah was called to experience God's protection from a flood.
 - i. But, he had to build the Ark in order to appropriate that promise.
 - ii. What would have happened if Noah hadn't believed God? If he said, like his neighbors, "what's a flood?"
 - iii. The flood would have still come, but the promise of salvation from the flood was possible only through obeying what God has instructed him to do.
 - b. Moses was given the promise that he would deliver Israel out of Egypt.
 - i. But to do so he had to appear before the Pharaoh (who was essentially a brother, adopted so to speak).
 - c. The disciples were given a promise of the Holy Spirit
 - i. Lu 24:49 *"And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."*
 - ii. But the condition was that they wait UNTIL (no time frame) this promise was fulfilled. They had no idea of how long it would take!.
 - iii. What would have happened if they had not waited, or had said, okay, 39 days is long enough, lets go and get busy!
 - d. In every case, **if the conditions of the promise had not be met, the promise would have been forfeited.**
 - e. This is why it is so important to pay attention to the conditions God sets for His promises.
3. What is the hardest part about there being conditions to a promise?
 - a. Often the conditions do not match our expectation, or they reveal or confront something in us that may be in opposition to God.
 - b. Consider a man named Naaman.
 - i. *2 Kings 5:8-15 1 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram.(Syria) He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. 2 Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." 4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. 5 "By all means, go," the king of*

Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents F5 of silver, six thousand shekels F6 of gold and ten sets of clothing. 6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy." 7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!" 8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

- 1. 11 But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage. 13 Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.*
- 2. 15 Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel."*

ii. Who was Naaman?

1. Naaman wasn't just some measly one star general he was a five star general in charge of all of the armies of Aram (Syria)
2. Naaman wasn't the commander of some small third-rate army either.
 - a. Syria was one of the superpowers of its day.
3. Naaman was a military strategist, a warrior, a war hero...but he was also a leper.
 - a. Back in that day lepers were cast out of society.
 - b. For public health they were not allowed to socialize with normal people.
 - c. Normally an important man like Naaman would be given a comfortable place in the palace and would be invited to banquets to tell of his great victories.
 - d. But instead Naaman's hands were tied by an incurable disease
4. The healing of Naaman is so important to the king of Aram that the king is willing to listen to the advice of a servant girl.
 - a. God had in His providence, placed this Israeli girl in Naaman's household through the unfortunate set of circumstances of a raid in which she became Naaman's wife's servant. (she is one of the true heroes of this story)
 - b. She tells Naaman's wife, who tells Naaman, who in turn tells the king, that she knows of this prophet in Samaria who can cure leprosy.
 - c. So the King of Aram sends a diplomatic mission to his sworn enemy (Israel) in order to seek healing for Naaman.
 - d. Keep in mind that under Naaman's command the Syrians had recently murdered Israel's King Ahab.
5. This would be like Osama Bin Laden sending a delegation to the U.S. asking them to treat one of his trusted lieutenants for cancer.

- a. So it's not surprising that when the king of Israel gets this request he freaks out.
- iii. Enter Elisha
 - 1. There is a prophet in Israel named Elisha. (spelled ELISHA). He is the successor to the greatest prophet that Israel had known up to this point...Elijah. (spelled ELIJAH). Elisha, the current prophet obtained a "double portion" of the Spirit of God that was upon Elijah, and subsequently, performed similar miracles.
 - 2. When Elisha gets wind of the fact that the king is upset about this delegation from Syria, he sends a message to the king. "Send him to me. We'll show him that there is a prophet in Israel."
- iv. The Meeting
 - 1. Naaman gathers up his royal entourage and goes to visit Elisha.
 - a. Naaman comes to Elisha expecting big things.
 - b. He came with his horses and chariots probably expecting to find a palace or temple or something. Instead he found a humble dwelling.
 - c. It was probably a comical sight.
 - d. Naaman "The Great" with his private guards and his gold and silver assembled before the small farm house.
 - e. Naaman expected the prophet to come out and perform some kind of elaborate ritual.
 - f. Maybe this prophet would come out and lay hands on him and call on God to heal him.
 - g. Maybe he would anoint him with oil and herbs or something.
 - h. Perhaps he would make sacrifices and chant incantations and use potions like the priests of Syria might have.
 - i. But Naaman was disappointed.
 - i. First of all Elisha didn't even come out of his house.
 - ii. And to add insult to injury, he sends out his servant out to relay his message.
 - 2. Here he is, the commander of the Aramean army and he doesn't even rate a personal audience with the prophet?!
 - a. He is robbed of a dramatic encounter—he didn't get a hand-to-the-forehead, "be healed" Sunday morning televangelist moment.
 - b. And all he says to Naaman was "Go wash in the Jordan seven times."
 - c. And the Jordan river was just a muddy little stream compared to the great rivers of Syria.
 - 3. Naaman was used to doing things in a big way, so this seemed ridiculous to him.
 - a. The task given him by Elisha was so small it was beneath him.
 - b. If Elisha had told him to conquer a kingdom, to slay a dragon, or to pay twice what he had brought with him, he would have.
 - c. But take a bath in a muddy brook? Why bother?
 - d. He didn't come to Israel to take a bath.
 - e. He could have done that back home. So that is where he headed; back home.
 - 4. But his servants represent the voice of reason. "*If Elisha had asked you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? All he said was 'wash and be clean.'*"
 - 5. Naaman finally realizes that the only one who stands in his way is himself.
 - a. Although it certainly means eating humble pie, he looks at his servants one last time and walks into that river, immersing himself seven times.
 - b. Suddenly, his flesh is restored like the flesh of a young boy.

- c. He is made clean and whole. In his delight and surprise, Naaman goes to see Elisha to thank him and to acknowledge the power of this God.
 - d. Somehow losing his pride was part of the healing.
 - c. Some of us are like Naaman as well.
 - i. **The only thing standing in our way to wholeness is ourselves.**
 - ii. Pride is a subtle seducer.
 - 1. It creeps into our lives and before long we find ourselves comforted by our academic degrees, the car we drive, the address we live at, and our children's accomplishments,
 - 2. What is it about pride in our lives that would make someone willing to walk away from God's blessings?
 - 3. I believe it is because **pride is the result of an ungrateful heart.**
 - 4. A proud person is someone who is accustomed to believing in themselves, who doesn't need God except for emergencies.
 - 5. Have you been there?
 - a. When you were ill you drew near to God?
 - i. But now that your body is working again, is God on the back burner?
 - b. When you were unemployed, you sought God diligently?
 - i. But now that you are working 60 hours a week, is God just an afterthought, someone you thank 3 times a day for your meals?
 - c. When you going through a divorce, you were crying out to God for help
 - i. But now that you have met someone new, do you have time for God?
 - iii. Consider Deut. 8:10-17 where God tells the Israelites: *"When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will BECOME PROUD and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.... You may say to yourself, 'MY POWER and THE STRENGTH OF MY HANDS have produced this wealth for me.'*
 - 1. Now that you have had your needs met, have you grown self-sufficient?
 - a. Be careful, pride goes before a fall.
 - b. God humbles those who exalt themselves. He did it with Naaman and He will not hesitate to do so with His own children.
 - 2. Think about Naaman when he shows up.
 - a. He's come to Elisha for a healing.
 - b. He didn't come there to hear about God. He wanted a drive-thru healing.
 - c. He wants to pay his money and go on home.
 - 3. BUT after his healing - after he's been humbled in God's presence - notice what he does. He wants to take God with him.
 - a. In II Kings 5:15-17
 - i. *"Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, 'Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant.' The prophet answered, 'As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.'* (**GOD'S**

GIFTS ARE ALWAYS FREE) And even though Naaman urged him, he refused. 'If you will not,' said Naaman, 'please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD.'"

- b. Naaman wants to take dirt from Israel home with him so that he can build an altar to worship the LORD. He wants to take God home with him.
 - c. You see, **a humbled heart wants nothing EXCEPT God in their lives.**
 - d. But **the proud heart makes no room for God in their lives.**
 - i. We will not receive God's promises in our lives when pride rules our lives...because we will not trust God sufficiently.
 - ii. We will be trusting ourselves instead.
 - iii. **You will not see your NEED for God's promises when you are stricken with pride..**
4. Promises with conditions expose our attitude of "I want this on my terms!"
- a. Naaman wanted God's blessings, but he only wanted them on his own terms.
 - b. In other words, Naaman wanted God to heal him... but he didn't want to have to obey God to get it done.
 - i. ILLUS: Does anybody know who (according to a recent survey) is considered the most influential spiritual leader in the US? No, not Billy Graham. No, it's not the Pope. It's Oprah Winfrey.
 - 1. When one preacher told his people that Oprah probably wasn't the most reliable source of spiritual guidance in people's lives... some of his people got angry with him. Why?
 - 2. Because there are "Churchgoers" who'd rather be guided by Oprah than by God.
 - 3. There are Churchgoers out there who would prefer Dr. Phil to the Bible.
 - 4. There are Churchgoers who religiously read their horoscopes but not their bibles.
 - ii. We want the blessings of Christ without following Him.
 - iii. We want the crown without the cross.
 - iv. We want resurrection without death.
 - 1. But read the New Testament carefully...every promise is on God's terms, not our own.
 - 2. He is God. We are not.
 - c. Another part of "wanting it my way" (not Burger King) is that there are folks who think that they can be "private Christians"
 - i. Listen to the conditions of this great promise:
 - ii. Romans 10:8-11 *"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," F58 that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."*
 - iii. According to the bible and this promise, **there is no such thing as a private Christian.**
 - 1. There are those who criticize Pres. Bush (and former Pres. Reagan) for being public with their faith. But it is those who criticize who are the weak ones. It takes great courage to publicly profess your belief in Jesus Christ, especially when it is unpopular.. It is an act of faith.
 - 2. I heard recently that what American Christians fear the most is being unpopular by others.

- a. They cannot stand the idea of people looking down on them.
 - b. We fear unpopularity and ridicule more than we fear losing our jobs, our money or our possessions.
 - c. It is one of the reasons that there are so many Americans who believe that they can live as “private Christian.
- iv. And yet, this is part of the reason that we baptize believers.
 - 1. Baptism has always been a part of the public profession of faith before the church and before the world.
 - 2. In fact in most nations, Baptism is an act of tremendous courage, because it is done publicly, and it can mean death in a Moslem nation, or hardship in a communist nation (Vietnam, China).
 - 3. I believe that this is why the New Testament says “*he who believes and is baptized will be saved.*”
 - a. Baptism doesn’t save you. Belief does.
 - b. But baptism is the action that follows faith. And in the early church, it was the public testimony of believers.
 - c. Those who refused to make that public confession were not treated as saved.
 - i. They valued approval of men more than approval of God.
 - ii. They valued their life on earth more than eternal life.
 - iii. They feared what men could do to them more than God.
- v. There is another side of confessing the Name of Jesus.
 - 1. There is a two edged conditional promise in Matthew 10:32-33 "*Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven*"
 - a. V 32 – the positive side of the promise.
 - b. V 33 – the negative side of the promise.
 - c. Both are promises based upon conditions being met.
 - 2. Nabisco story of public acknowledgement before men.
 - 3. Baptism class Feb 13th with Baptism on Feb 20th.
 - a. We have several people who have made decisions to follow Christ who will be publicly professing their faith in Him and cementing that faith with this public action.
 - b. Maybe you have been a secret Christian, telling only other Christians, or thinking that because you come to church, that is enough. But the bible says it must be a confession from the mouth...and not just belief in the heart.
 - c. You can break free and publicly proclaim your faith in Christ.
 - d. There is coming a time in our world where Christians will not just fear unpopularity but much worse. Will you have made your stand for Christ before then?
- vi. Do it today. **The only thing standing in your way to wholeness is yourself**