

The Greatest Promise

1. We have been learning about the Promises of God...and last week we learned about God's provision. I read a story this week about a young Jewish woman who brings home her fiancée to meet her parents.
 - a. After dinner, her mother tells her father to find out about the young man. The father invites the fiancée to his study for a drink. "So what are your plans?" the father asks the young man. "I am a Torah scholar," he replies. "A Torah scholar. Hmmm," the father says. "Admirable, but what will you do to provide a nice house for my daughter to live in, as she's accustomed to?" "I will study," the young man replies, "and God will provide for us." "And how will you buy her a beautiful engagement ring, such as she deserves?" asks the father. "I will concentrate on my studies," the young man replies, "God will provide for us." "And children?" asks the father. "How will you support children?" "Don't worry, sir, God will provide," replies the fiancée. The conversation proceeds like this, and each time the father questions, the young idealist insists that God will provide.
 - b. Later, the mother asks, "How did it go, Honey?" The father answers, "He has no job and no plans, but the good news is he thinks I'm God."
2. Review
 - a. God has made over 4000 promises in the bible. Many of them are for you and I.
 - b. God always keeps His promises.
 - i. He is unlike us
 - ii. He cannot lie, change His mind nor can he deceive us.
 - c. Faith is not a denial of evidence but a recognition that God is greater than the problem and trusting His resources to meet the need.
 - iii. *Faith is looking to God and not your circumstances.*
 1. That is why faith is so often termed "evidence of things unseen."
 2. Last week I shared our Vision concerning "Making Room for Others"
 - a. We didn't ask for pledge cards. In fact, that was on purpose. It was a decision we made so as to act on faith rather than on sight.
 - i. Why? David & Census. Makes us feel better.
 - ii. We would trust the numbers we see instead of God who we don't see.
 - b. This led me to feel vulnerable. I felt very "out on a limb" by the time I went home. Why?
 - i. Because I was forced to trust God instead of my powers of persuasion.
 - ii. I was forced to trust that God would speak to your hearts instead of trusting in the feedback I would get from you.
 - iii. When you walk by faith...you will feel vulnerable. But you are safe. That is why we look at God instead of our circumstances.
 - d. A promise is only as good as the one who makes the promise.
 - iv. Therefore, our faith really is not really in the promise but the promisor.
 - e. The way that we pray is a reflection of how we perceive God. (Do we treat Him as a Genie, etc)
 - f. Prayer and the Promises of God are a call to an ever deepening relationship
 - v. To know the will of God we must be IN the will of God.
 - g. Last week we learned that "*where God guides, He provides.*"
 - vi. God is teaching us, disciplining us...to depend upon Him.
 - vii. We also learned about how *Ownership determines responsibility.*
 1. When we own something, we are responsible for it.
 2. Its our job to worry about it.

3. But God really owns and controls all of it...our belief that we own or control something is an illusion.
 4. And if God owns it...then I can trust Him to take care of these 'things' because they are His responsibility. This frees me from worry!
2. The Greatest Promise – What is it?
- a. For most of us, the greatest promise a person can make to us is to love us for the rest of their lives, irrespective of circumstance, health, or situation.
 - i. Many of us have made these promises to someone.
 - ii. Many of us here have been blessed to have that promise kept for a lifetime.
 - iii. But some of us have experienced the misfortune of not having had that promise kept by someone or you perhaps haven't kept that promise to someone.
 - iv. But even a bad experience with such a big promise doesn't deter most folks from trying again...believing that it is possible to love and be loved.
 - b. Being loved...no matter what. That is a great promise.
 - i. It is what romance novels and fairy tales are made of!
 - ii. It seems that none of us are really capable of doing that perfectly though.
 - iii. Our lives have many fractures and failings and we just don't love the way we wish we could...in an ideal world.
 - iv. But God can. But God does. God alone can and does love perfectly.
3. God's Greatest Promise – Eternal love, Eternal life.
- a. 1Jo 2:25 *This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.*
 - b. Some of us may believe we understand this promise...but to grasp God's greatest promise we need to understand and define several things from God's perspective.
 - i. **Death**
 1. Some of you have heard my definition of death before, but some of you have not.
 - a. Death means "to separate" something from its source of life.
 - b. **Physical Death is separation of the soul from the body.**
 - i. Without the soul the body is "life-less."
 - ii. It also means to separate us from one another...which is the grief that accompanies the death of a loved one.
 2. We are spiritual beings clothed in a body. And when our body dies, our spirit will live on. It is the eternal part of us.
 3. Spiritual death is similar to physical death. Listen to this verse.
 - a. John 5:24 *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."*
 - b. Did you hear those last 8 words? "He has crossed over from death to life?"
 - c. **Spiritual death is separation of our spirit from God.**
 - i. **We are born spiritually dead.**
 1. Everyone is born that way.
 2. The bible says that "the penalty of sin is death," and it also says that "all have sinned."
 3. *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Rom 6:23
 4. God won't let sin into heaven.
 5. What would happen if God were to let us into Heaven just as we are? Then Heaven would be ruined!

- a. Were God to let just one single sin into His Heaven, then soon everything there would look like here on Earth.
- b. Following the law of sin, its destructive effects would also corrupt the Heaven of God.
- c. In this place of peace, joy and love, suddenly death, sickness and hate would gain entry, and Heaven would no longer be Heaven.
- d. But God does not want that under any circumstances! That is why He takes sin so seriously and blocks its every access:
- e. *Nothing impure will ever enter it* (Revelation 21:27).
- ii. **By spiritual death, we mean to say that our spirit is dead towards God...**but we still have a spirit (death doesn't mean destruction).
- iii. A person can be dead spiritually but still experience spiritual things.
 - 1. It is for this reason that you have such interest in New Age Spirituality – Wicca, Demonology, Mediums, Tarot, etc.
 - 2. They are having very real experiences...but not with God.
 - 3. Their spirits are interfacing with spiritual beings because we are created to be spiritual beings.
- iv. By being spiritually dead, we mean that someone does not have a relationship with God.
- v. It means that God is not dwelling in their spirit.
- d. We have to experience a spiritual birth in order to have spiritual life.
 - i. And we must have our sins forgiven & cleansed in order to access heaven.
 - ii. It is for this reason that Jesus said that a person must be “born again” John 3:3 says, *“Jesus... said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*
 - iii. We are born once – physically, but we must be born a second time – spiritually in order to experience spiritual and eternal life.
 - iv. Born once – die twice (physical and spiritual); born twice – die once (physically only)

ii. **Spiritual Life is knowing God.**

- 1. Jesus said, *“Eternal life is this, that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”* (Jn 17:3)
 - a. Spiritual life, comes from our experience of God and His grace and love.
 - b. *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.* (Jn 3:16)
 - c. Do you see the condition for eternal, spiritual life?
 - i. It is faith, trust in Jesus Christ and His work in dying for your sins. When you place your faith in the work of Jesus and stop trusting your own works, you will experience what the bible calls a “new birth.”
 - ii. John 3:36 *And all who believe in God's Son have eternal life. Those who don't obey the Son will never experience eternal life, but the wrath of God remains upon them.”*

- iii. The wrath of God is upon those who reject His very best gift...the gift of His Son. It is strange that folks would want God to give them money and happiness for this short life but reject God's very best gift that promises eternal life.
 - iv. You see, you cannot pay for your sins.
 - 1. You cannot earn God's forgiveness.
 - 2. You cannot pay the price of a single sin you have committed, much less the countless ones you have made.
 - v. You and I need a savior. That is why Jesus came. To pay the debt that you and I could not...because He is the only sinless, spotless one.
 - vi. That is the love of God demonstrated...*"that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly."*
 - vii. You and I receive the promise of eternal life one way and one way only. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me."*
 - d. All who reject the free gift of forgiveness and life will have to face God and receive the penalty for their refusal to receive His free gift.
 - i. Oh, they will live forever. All of us will. But those who reject God, who prefer to live a self-led life here will get to be "god's" of their own lives forever...in a place so horrible that Jesus said it was a place where "the worm does not die and the fire never goes out."
 - ii. We all live for eternity.
 - iii. But we are offered a choice in our destination.
 - iv. We can receive a promise of eternal life or we can take our own way and choose eternal death – separation from God.
 - v. It is our choice.
 - e. Mt. 10:28 *"Do not fear those who can kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*
- iii. Eternity – aspects of Eternity.
- 1. The bible says that God has *placed eternity in the hearts of men.* (Eccl 3:11)
 - a. We all have a sense of 4-ever.
 - 2. **Length of Eternity**
 - a. Is a long, long time. It is so long that our finite minds cannot even conceive of something that lasts forever
 - b. It has been said that if a bird sharpened its beak once every 1000 years on the tip of Mt. Everest, that once Mt. Everest wore down to sea level, one second would have passed in eternity.
 - c. But while that is a good illustration of scope, it is a misrepresentation of eternity.
 - i. Time, you see is a conveyor belt.
 - ii. You get on it and you travel to its destination.
 - iii. God, however, and eternity, stands outside the conveyor belt and observes the entire scenario all at once, unbounded by its confines.
 - 3. **Quality of Eternity**
 - a. Besides the length of eternity, Jesus gave us many illustrations of its quality.

- b. He didn't leave us to wonder about what heaven (**eternal life with God**) would be like.
- c. He gave us many, many illustrations and pictures, trying to paint as clear of a picture as our human intellects can grasp.
 - i. **Heaven is worth waiting & preparing for:**
 - 1. *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* Ro 8:18
 - ii. **Heaven will be a place where no more death pain or tears occur.**
 - 1. *He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away«* (Revelation 21:4).
 - iii. **Heaven is the home we were made for.**
 - 1. *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.* John 14:2-3,
 - 2. Some of you have heard the story of Enoch, how he walked with God and one day God took him to heaven without dying.
 - a. A little girl who described what she had learned in Sunday School said to her mother, "One day Enoch and God took a long walk together until Enoch said it was getting late. And the Lord said, 'We are now closer to my home than we are to yours... Why don't you just come to my home tonight?'"
 - b. Donald Barnhouse on the way home from the funeral of his first wife, was trying to think of some way of comforting his children. Just then a huge moving van passed by their car and its shadow swept over them. Instantly, Barnhouse asked, "children, would you rather be run over by a truck or by its shadow?" The children replied, "Of course, we'd prefer the shadow." To which Barnhouse replied, "Two thousand years ago, the truck of death ran over the Lord Jesus...now only the shadow of death can run over us."
 - c. The tomb is not the entrance to death but to life. It is the doorway to heaven
 - iv. **Heaven will be full of joy & God's presence**
 - 1. *"God will fill us with joy in His presence, with eternal pleasures at His right hand."* (Psalm 16:11)
- d. A little boy was offered the opportunity to select a dog for his birthday present. At the pet store, he was shown a number of puppies. From them he picked one whose tail was wagging furiously. When he was asked why he selected that particular dog, the little boy said, "I wanted the one with the happy ending."
 - i. Eternity for those who know Christ will be a place of a happy ending that lasts forever.

4. **Permanence of Eternity**

- a. Eternity, once entered is a one way door.
 - i. You cannot go back into the realm of time and human existence to undo something you have done.
 - ii. Isaiah 43:13 *"Even from eternity I am He, And there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?"*
 - iii. Once we leave this realm of space and time and enter eternity, we cannot change the place where we dwell.
 - b. The direction of time's arrow: The course of events in our world flows in one direction.
 - i. The irreversibility of occurrences.
 - ii. Time is like an arrow that points from the past into the future.
 - iii. A cup that drops to the floor will shatter. No matter how long we stare at it, it will not reassemble itself.
 - iv. Time is irreversible.
 - c. We will live forever with God or we will forever be apart from Him, alone, lost, without end.
 - i. If the joy of the believer is forever, then the sorrow of the unbeliever is also forever.
 - ii. If heaven is eternal, likewise so is hell.
 - 1. *Jesus said that the "worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched."*
 - d. A man or woman whose body lies in a casket at a funeral is fully aware. No, not their body, but their spirit.
 - i. Their future is no longer changeable.
 - ii. Their destiny is fixed forever, once they have passed through the one-way doorway into eternity.
 - iii. There are no second chances.
 - iv. Our destiny in eternity is determined by our choices in this all too short life.
 - v. And eternity is a very, very long time.
5. Are you prepared to gamble your eternity on a few short years of a self-led life?
4. **The Promise of Eternal Life is a promise you can KNOW:**
- a. *These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.* (1 Jn 5:13)
 - b. Over and over again, over 40 times in the New Testament, the term "eternal life" is used in the context of experiencing it. It is not some elusive "hope so."
 - i. It is something that you get to first hand begin your experience of in the here and now and continue into eternity.
 - ii. In a very real sense, when you receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you also begin eternal life.
5. **This Promise of eternal life will never be broken.**
- a. Jim Elliot: *"He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep in order to gain that which he cannot lose."*
 - i. When our body dies, we leave it behind, we are separated from it, but the bible says, "What can separate us from the love of Christ..."
 - 1. (Romans 8:38-39) *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

- ii. They will "*receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*" (1 Peter 1:4; 5:4)
- b. The promise of eternal life will not be revoked.
 - i. The Greek word for "separate" found in Romans 8:38-39 is Chorizo – which is used to describe the act of *divorcing or separating* from a spouse.
 - 1. Essentially, God is saying that He will never DIVORCE you.
 - ii. Once you come to faith and knowledge of Christ it is something you cannot ever lose.
 - 1. God's promise stays with anyone who has placed their faith in Christ. The only condition is persistence or endurance of faith on our part.
 - 2. God will not give up on you. He promises that.
 - 3. Your faith in that promise is what will hold you like glue to Him.
 - iii. Is there anything you can do that will cause God to cancel the promise?
 - 1. The only condition to eternal life is faith.
 - 2. It is likewise the only condition to losing the promise.
 - a. True faith endures. It doesn't give up.
 - b. If it is wishful thinking, you will give up as soon as some difficulty comes alone.
 - c. But if your faith is real...experiential and true, you won't stop trusting God.
 - d. You may stray, but you will never run away. Because you know He loves you.
 - iv. You did nothing to EARN eternal life and there is nothing you can do to EARN THE RIGHT TO KEEP IT. You cannot earn God's love or favor.
 - 1. You stay in God's favor the same way you found God's favor.
 - 2. By Faith.
 - 3. The righteous will walk by faith. We are justified and we are kept by faith.
 - 4. It is the act of relying upon Christ alone that got us the promise and it that same act of continuing to rely upon Christ that holds the promise. Faith is your victory.
- c. Won't you receive the promise of eternal life today?
 - i. It is an offer that the bible says "All who call upon the Lord shall be saved."
 - ii. Will you call upon Him today? Haven't you been running away and running your own life long enough? Isn't eternity too great of a value to risk on a passing pleasure? Choose Jesus today. He has chosen you. You aren't here by accident. He has been calling your name. You have felt uncomfortable, you have wanted to run, but you have stayed. You know He is calling. Don't refuse Him. Surrender today.
 - iii. Let's pray. If you desire to surrender to Christ today...to receive His promise of eternal life today...you can pray these words along with me:
 Oh God...I am sorry for rejecting You and living life as if I were god. I want the promise of eternal life that can begin today. I want to be forgiven of my sins. I want to know You and experience the 2nd birth. Come into my life. I trust you for eternity, and receive Jesus as my Savior. In Jesus Name...Amen.