

The Promise

Thesis: God begins a process of redemption and restoration by choosing, covenanting with, and remaining faithful to Abram and the nation that eventually comes from him.

Big Question: How does God's plan of redemption and restoration begin?

Scripture: Genesis 11-Gen.12-Ex. 19; Jer 31:33-34

Introduction

As many of you know, I recently moved from Decatur, TX to Red Oak.

- Decatur is the county seat.
 - It's downtown area is built around a square with an old courthouse.
 - An old courthouse that is architecturally similar to the one in Waxahachie.
- One of the neat things that takes place on the Decatur Square in the Summer is Cruise Nights.
 - Old restored classic cars line the parking spots around the square.
 - Every so often, when I remembered Cruise Nights was happening, I would go down to the square to photograph those old cars.

Looking back through those pictures recently, I'm still impressed with how well those old cars were restored.

- If you have ever restored an old car, you know that a lot of effort, money and time has to go into the restoration process.
 - It doesn't happen overnight, nor does it happen without a plan.

Just as those car owners had a plan to restore the cars they showed off throughout the summer at Cruise Nights, God has a plan He is actively working out to restore this broken world.

- We know that God has a plan because He reveals His plan to us in Scripture.

What is God's plan to restore this broken world?

I. God's Plan of restoration is unlikely and involves unlikely people (Gen. 11-12:9)

Last week we ended our trek through the storyline of Scripture with Genesis chapter 11 and the tower of Babel.

- There we learned that God confused the language of the people, in an effort to force them to scatter throughout His creation and begin to take the world somewhere.
 - For several generations afterwards, the people did just that.
 - They were fruitful and multiplied, filling the earth and settling in their own lands.
 - They pushed back the chaos and began to create something beautiful and orderly.

- They began to function as kings exercising dominion over the world.
- And as priests working it and keeping it.

Transition: Even though mankind eventually did what they were designed to do, they still attempted to operate as big “K” kings. As a result, the world remained broken and messed up. At this point in the story we are left to wonder:

A. HOW IS GOD GOING TO RESTORE THIS BROKEN WORLD?

- **We know it’s going to happen because He promised to set things right in Genesis 3:15 when He tells us that the woman’s offspring will bruise the head of the serpent.**
 - The **serpent** in the story is representative of Satan.
 - Which means God is eventually going to destroy Satan.
 - He is going to do it through the woman’s offspring, who will receive a mortal wound Himself.
 - Because He has a plan to restore this world, God continues to **forbear** against sinful man’s rebellion.
 - But that is all we know so far.
 - We don’t know the details of how restoration is going to occur, or who the serpent crusher is.
 - All we have encountered in the story so far is the rebelliousness of man, the promise of God, as well as His gracious forbearance.

But at the end of chapter 11 everything changes.

- Just after the Tower of Babel incident, where man seeks to make a name for themselves, we are introduced to a couple — Abram and Sarah, who live in the land of Haran.
 - They are nothing special.
 - In fact, they are an unlikely couple from which to build a nation because they are elderly and childless (Gen 11:30-32).

Transition: But that should clue us into the fact that God is going to use them because God has a habit of using unlikely people. At the beginning of chapter 12, we see God doing just that,

B. GOD SINGLES OUT AN UNLIKELY COUPLE.

Starting in verse 1 we read,

"Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless

those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”” (Ge 12:1–3)

God not only singles out Abram but He asks him to do something difficult and out of the ordinary.

- He asks Abram to leave all that he has ever known and start walking to a land He will show him.
 - Imagine being in Abram’s shoes!?!?

ILLUSTRATION: Many of you have lived in Red Oak your whole life.

- Some of you have lived on the same plot of land for most of, if not all of the time you have lived in Red Oak.
 - Imagine God coming and asking you to leave behind all that you have ever known. All your inheritance, all your family and friends, your career, everything.
 - He wants you to leave it all behind for an unknown land;
 - One you have never visited;
 - One God doesn’t even tell you about?
 - There is no tour; there is no real estate agent to help you pick out the plot you will build your homestead on.
 - You can’t take an exploration trip to see if you click with the people in the region.
 - You just have to pack everything up and start traveling until God tells you to stop.
 - Imagine God asking you to do that?
 - That is what God asked Abram to do.

Transition: While that is a huge request:

God promises Abram a big reward.

- He promises to make Abram into a great nation.
 - To make his name great
 - To provide protection.
 - and to make him a blessing to the whole earth.
- A big request but a big reward.

Transition: That last promise — that Abram is going to be a blessing to the whole earth serves to advance the story because it tells us that:

C. GOD PLANS TO USE ABRAM AND HIS FAMILY TO RESTORE THIS BROKEN WORLD.

- We aren’t told how, just that it’s going to happen, and it’s going to happen through Abram and his family.

Transition: While God's promise provides hope that the world will be restored,

D. GOD'S DECISION TO USE ABRAM RAISES A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS.

Abram and Sarai don't have any children.

- It's not like they are spring chickens.
 - Abram is 75 years old.
 - I don't know about you but I don't see too many 75 year olds having kids.
 - So how in the world is God going to bring about a nation from this couple?
 - How are they going to be a blessing to the whole earth?

This leaves us wondering: Has God made a mistake?

- Is He just setting Himself up for failure?

Transition: While that might be our first reaction, we have to remember that God chooses Abram for a reason.

E. GOD CHOOSES ABRAM TO SHOW US THAT HE WORKS IN UNLIKELY WAYS

- He works in unlikely ways for a reason.
 - God's not just out to redeem and restore the world, **He also wants us to see that He is the King and this is His Kingdom.**
 - He is in control.
 - He is the all-sovereign Creator and Sustainer of this universe.
 - As well as He wants us to realize **He is greater and wiser than we could ever be.**
 - His plans are grander and more complex than we can ever imagine.
 - **He really is capable of doing the impossible.**
 - He wants us to see all that **so that we would place our faith and trust in Him and Him alone.**

APPLICATION: I don't know about you but it's hard to place our faith and trust in God and God alone.

- It is our natural bent to want to be in control.
 - Adam and Eve set us down that path when they brought the effects of the Fall on the whole world.
 - As a result, we want to be king and rule this world like it is our own kingdom.
 - We want to determine what is right and wrong.
 - What is good and evil.
 - Where we are going to go and what we are going to do.

- We don't want to depend on or submit ourselves to anyone else, let alone God.
- We want to be in control.
- We want to be the king.

We want to be in control because we think that is what will make our lives better.

- But controlling our own destiny isn't the answer to a better life.
- Listen to how one author puts it,

“There's a daily struggle in our hearts where we are convinced that if we could just control all the variables of our life, we can make everything come to pass in a way that would serve us the best. It's a lie. It's a lie that goes all the way back to Genesis...All the way back to the very beginning.”

After highlighting the lie, he tells us that we must trust God. We must believe He is good and is for us. For, as the author goes on to say,

“if God's not good and God's not real, when real life comes our way, we cannot possible get through it.”¹

That's so true, without God, getting through this life is impossible.

- Honestly, when I think about those who aren't Christians, I don't know how they get through some of the most difficult things people deal with like loosing a loved one, their business, or their life savings.
- When tragedy strikes, I don't know how people get through it without God.
- But here is the thing, we don't just need God when tragedy strikes, we need Him everyday, all day.
 - We need Him leading and guiding us every step of the way.
 - The only way that is going to happen is if we give up control over our lives and place our trust in the Lord.

Admittedly that's a difficult thing to do, and God knows it's difficult for us to give up control and depend fully on Him, which is why I believe He often works in ways that confound us.

- God chose to use Abram and Sarai not because they were the best choice.
- Instead He chose them to show us His power and wisdom, so that we would trust in Him instead of ourselves.

Transition: Having chose Abram, and Abram having agreed to God's demand, leaving his land behind to follow God to this mysterious, unknown land God has promised to give him, (Gen 12:4-9), God makes a covenant with Abram. God's covenant reveals that:

¹ http://bible.realitysf.com/assets/uploads/dl/RSF_Week7.pdf by Pastor Toby Kurth, *Promise and Purpose*

II. God's plan of restoration is rooted in an unconditional promise with a conditional time fulfillment (Gen. 15:7-17)

We will talk about what both of those mean in turn.

Let's focus first on

A. THE UNCONDITIONAL ASPECT OF THE COVENANT

In chapter 15, God comes to Abram and starting in verse 7 says,

"I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half." (Ge 15:7-10)

What God asks Abram to do may appear gruesome, barbaric, or weird to us, but this is how they made covenants back then.

They cut animals in two and after they did, the two people who were entering into the covenant with one another, would walk through the middle of the animals.

- When they did that, what they were doing was saying to one another,

"If I don't uphold my end of the covenant, may what has been done to these animals be done to me."

Gruesome or not, this act was meant to drive home the seriousness of the covenant and sear in your mind what you had agreed to do.

- As well as it left no mystery as to what would happen if you broke the covenant.

Transition: But here is where things take a turn.

We are told in verse 12,

"As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him." (Ge 15:12)

After which, God spoke to Abram, reiterating His promise to give him the land, telling him what was going to happen to the family that was to come from him, and when they would inherit the land.

- He even tells Abram how long he would live.

Then in verse 17 we are told,

"When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces." (Ge 15:17)

- The smoking fire pot and flaming torch represents God.
- If you notice, He's the only One that passes through the pieces.
 - That's out of the ordinary.
 - Usually both parties would pass through the animals, not just one.
 - But God is the only One who goes through, which tells us that God's covenant with Abram was unconditional.
 - Meaning that God was going to uphold His end of the bargain no matter what.
 - It didn't matter what Abram did, God would be there. He would be for him, even when he wasn't for God.
 - That's an important promise because there is no way Abram could be 100% faithful to God.
 - He was going to mess up at some point.
 - It's inevitable because he's been affected by the Fall.
- But you know what, God makes the covenant with Him anyways.
- He knew Abram would grieve Him.
 - He knew He and the nation that eventually came from Him would repeatedly sin against Him.
 - He knew they would pursue other gods, trusting, glorifying, and thanking those gods over Him, even though He was the real reason for their blessing and protection.
 - God knew all these things would happen, but He pursues a covenant with Abram and the nation that would come from Him anyways.
- No matter what God was going to fulfill His promises to Abram — the one He had chose and covenanted with to begin His restoration project.

Transition: While God promises to fulfill His covenant with Abram — and that promise is unconditional, God's covenant with Abram also has a conditional aspect to it. So let's look at:

B. THE CONDITIONAL ASPECT OF THE COVENANT.

- The covenant promise is not conditioned on Abram's obedience, and I want to be clear about that. **Rather the how and when of the covenant promise is conditional.**
- In other words, the timing of God's promise to Abram is conditioned on obedience.
 - The salvation that everyone longed for could only be brought about by the One who is completely obedient to God's demands.

- Until that One came, true redemption and salvation could not happen.
- God required complete obedience from Adam, Noah, Abram, the nation of Israel, as well as David.
 - But, and I don't believe this is a spoiler, none of them were able to provide complete obedience.
 - Not Adam, not Noah, not Abram, not Israel, not David, or any of the kings who came after him.
 - So the search for the serpent crushing king, the seed of the woman who would be a blessing to the nations kept going.
 - **It is that search, it is that condition — complete and absolute obedience — that drives the biblical narrative forward.**

With that, we can say that God's covenant with Abram is both conditional and unconditional.

- It is **unconditional** in the sense that God will bring about the promise He made to Abram.
 - But it is **conditional** in the sense that the promise will not be realized until One who can render complete obedience comes on the scene.

Transition: As you continue through the story of Scripture, you see that God remains faithful to His covenant, which tells us that:

III. God's plan of restoration is undeterred by our failures (Gen.12-Ex. 19; Jer 31:33-34)

Not only does He remain faithful to Abram, but to his family and the nation that ultimately comes from him as well.

- Time and time again, God upholds His promise despite their disobedience.

And time and time again God will uphold His promise to us as well.

- When we mess up, when we sin, when we seek to be big "K" Kings living according to our own definition of what is good, God doesn't abandon us.
 - He doesn't abandon us not only because of the covenant He made with Abram, but also the promise He makes to us through the New Covenant.

In Jeremiah 31 we read God's promise,

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Je 31:33–34)

Not only do we learn that God will make a New Covenant with us, but we learn that we will be His people.

- We will always remain His people because He will forgive our iniquity and He will remember our sins no more.

Why can God do that?

I ask that because God is holy and just.

- As a holy and just God, He must punish sin.
 - We are a wicked people who deserve nothing but punishment.
 - No one is righteous, no not one.
 - So what we deserve is for God to pour His wrath out on us.

Transition: If that is what we deserve,

How can God forgive us?

He can forgive us because of the complete obedience and the sacrifice of the Seed.

- If you remember back to the beginning of the sermon, I said that a seed was coming that would not only deliver a mortal blow to Satan but receive One Himself.
 - The blow the Seed receives ends up being a sacrifice delivered on our behalf.
 - The offspring of the woman, who we will look at in more detail next week, comes and dies for us.
 - When He does, He absorbs God's wrath and makes it possible for God to forgive us our sin and never hold it against us ever again.
- That tells us, then, that our relationship with God is not dependent on us, our performance, or how good we are.
 - It's not thwarted by our sin.
 - Because of God's covenant promises and faithfulness He will continue to patiently forbear with us, working out His plan of redemption and restoration, even as we rebel against Him, seeking His throne as big "K" kings in His Kingdom.
- Our God is faithful despite our faults!
- **Our God is gracious and merciful.**
 - He is **merciful** in that He doesn't give us what we deserve, which again is punishment.
 - Instead He give us what we don't deserve — that is salvation, a restored relationship with Him, access to His everlasting Kingdom — that is His grace.
 - It is a gift He has given us at great cost to Him and no cost to us.
- You need to understand that we don't deserve this gift — we don't deserve salvation at all.

- We don't deserve God's grace and mercy.
- That is why it is called grace and mercy.

God doesn't give us what we deserve. Instead, He gives us what we don't deserve.

- For that we should praise God because we are all faulty people, who sin each and every day against God and one another.
- But God continues to patiently use us, just as He did Abram and His family and His people, to extend His kingdom and message to the world.
- Our God is a faithful covenant keeping God in whom we can trust and rest.

Conclusion

Next week, we are going to see just how far God is willing to go to fulfill His promise to Abram and us.

Time of Response

But for now, let's take the opportunity to praise and worship God for His never-ending covenant faithfulness.

- That's how you can respond if you are a believer.
 - You can respond by praising and worshipping God.
 - By standing in awe of His faithfulness, despite our sin, our rebellion, our desire to be big "K" kings.

If you are not yet a believer, now is an opportunity for you to turn and worship God as well.

- As we will find out more next week, you can worship God because Jesus died on your behalf.
 - He paid the penalty you deserve — death.
 - All those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, can experience a covenant relationship with God.
 - They can experience hope and joy.
 - They can experience eternal life and true restoration.

If you have not yet turned to Jesus, now is an opportunity for you to do so.

- Today is the day of salvation.
 - Today is the day for you to experience a restored relationship with God.
 - Turn and believe in Jesus today!