

Faithful Living in a Fallen World: A Study in the Life of Abraham

Lesson #2, *Genesis 12:10-13:4*

Promise Keepers? Losers! Weepers!



[Front door class closed, back door locked and chained. Good stuff, unless you LIVE in the house and want to get in. Garage? Carol, “You have a key on your key-ring why don’t you use it?” When I go outdoors to walk the dogs, what use is Shady Acre’s “No bite me bug cream” if I don’t rub it in?] What good is a key if you don’t use it? How can anti-itch cream relieve your itch if you don’t rub it in? And what good is a promise, if you don’t use it? [The men’s movement aka “Promise Keepers” began in 1996 under Coach Bill McCarthy

and has grown throughout the years. The movement is a good one in a # of ways. A number of men have come to know the Lord in a saving way since 1996. [Cotton Bowl . . . In a world where men are being emasculated and transgendered, men need to be men, and proud of it! “The Art of Manliness” is GREAT! Hosted by CHRISTIANS! And . . . men NEED to be more committed to the promises they have made to other people (spouse \ church, children, workplace) and to the Lord. There’s nothing wrong w/being a member of the “Promise Keepers” movement. The PROBLEM is when being a “Promise Keeper” becomes your PRIMARY IDENTITY & a source of self-righteousness. Bumper sticker: I’M a PROMISE KEEPER. Are YOU?? The term can broadcast a kind of “spiritual one-upmanship” that detracts from the glory of the grace of GOD in the Gospel, which is NOT about what I do, you do, we do . . . not about our record or resume, but about what the LJX has done FOR US!].

Fact is, GOD is the original, and only, “**P**romise **K**eeper”. We’re only @ our best struggling “promise keepers,” and not very good ones at that! In fact, in this fallen world, we even struggle with the promises our Divine “Promise Keeper” makes to us – promises God WILL keep, always! What does that struggle look like? It looks a lot like what happened to a struggling “promise keeper” by the name of Abram when life seemed to go South – like life sometimes does for us. As we consider the lessons of the narrative, let’s look at the promises of God, our (often wrong) response, what dynamic guarantees the promises of God, and the grace of God.

1. God makes PROMISES, and yet they sometimes appear so FRAGILE.

- ***In Vv 7 and 10, we see how the Lord often assures us of something (the “land”), but then something comes along (a famine in the land Abram is promised) and puts a big question mark after that assurance. Where does this happen?***

It happens in marriage [a wife is a blessing . . . that over the years becomes “the ole ball & chain”, marriage feels like a SENTENCE. It happens @ work [dream jobs can turn into nightmares, in a matter of days & weeks]. It happens w/CHILDREN [a blessing & a gift], who often turn out to be trials to endure instead of blessings to enjoy. In a fallen world, EVERYTHING has potential of backfiring! The UPSIDE of blessings conflict with the REALITIES of life lived EAST of Eden!

- ***Where in the Bible do we see a great assurance followed by a great test? (cf Mark 1:11-13; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4)*** JESUS is assured that God is well-pleased w/Him, and then IMMEDIATELY he’s out in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. Spiritual Highs followed (often quickly) by spiritual lows [from attending a Xn concert to yelling, screaming, and in a rage, putting his fist dia a wall @ his house, that same night!] PAUL’S ecstatic experience, being caught up into heaven & hearing things unlike anything he had EVER heard. Then, Paul’s given a thorn in the flesh, to keep him humble!
- How should we respond to this mysterious pattern of God’s ways? First, EXPECT it. If JESUS experienced it, how can WE NOT expect to experience it? REALITY CHECK: W/great blessings come great tests. Also, like William Cowper did, ACKNOWLEDGE that “God Works In Mysterious Ways” we cannot wrap our minds around. And besides, A god we can understand is NOT the God of the Bible!

2. God’s Promises should NOT lead us into PANIC!

In these Vv, there’s a *problem* (Vs 11), a *peril* (Vs 12), and a *policy* (Vs 13).

- ***What are the first words Abram is recorded to say in Scripture? Why is that a problem?***
The 1st recorded words of Abraham (if you’re into Bible trivia) are words spoken to COMPLEMENT his wife on how beautiful she is! Side note to husbands: It might help your marriage to take a page from Abraham’s playbook! BUT . . . beauty is a PROBLEM because men WILL look [pre-marital counseling . . . hope you’re not the Jealous type . . .]
- ***What is the peril?*** People may want Sarai [Those women from “Ur” of the Chaldies are real “lookers”, aren’t they??] and kill Abraham to acquire her (for Pharaoh).
HERE’S THE TENSION IN THE STORY

- **How can the danger be overcome (according to Abraham)?** Well, if HONESTY is the best policy, then Abraham does NOT embrace the best policy. Instead of saying “She’s my WIFE,” Abraham tells the Egyptians that Sarai is his SISTER, which is intentional deception.

**** We LIE when we INTEND to DECEIVE. ** [time of day mistake / not true VS time of day lie... underage young men in the civil war taking slips of paper and writing “18” on the slips of paper and when asked “How old are you?” Simply, “I’m over 18”.]**

- **What is Abram’s (and OUR) underlying problem when we lie?** Abram is acting in unbelief. Abraham is not @ that time believing in the promises of God that from Him and Sarai would come a great hosts of people who would bless EVERY NATION in the world. Abraham is acting in UNBELIEF. (acting in unbelief). AND, HE wants to be in control of the situation! So, Abraham LIES. God’s promise is NOT enough. I MUST DO SOMETHING TO MAKE IT HAPPEN. IT’S ALL UP TO ME!!
- **Basically, our tendency is, we FAIL to APPLY what we KNOW in the SITUATION we’re in – especially when our situation is a perilous one!** A study in a mainline magazine on “WHY WE LIE” . . . A majority of lies we tell are either to make ourselves look better OR to “cover our backsides”. [Pre-marital counseling, 1 of the woman’s needs: “for her spouse to tell her the TRUTH”. Why not? Can’t handle / cover backside! [Once, no, many times, I would LIE to “cover” what my friends were doing. The result? My friends still got into trouble, but so did I! My Mom would not “cover” for me to make me look better than I really was (Sadie Hawkins dance . . . In my pride . . . “Stevie told me to tell you he wasn’t home and doesn’t want to go to the dance with you!)]. Lying only makes the problem worse.

3. Only God’s POWER can GUARANTEE God’s Promises.

- **What’s the basic message the Lord is communicating in Vs 17?** You mess w/God’s people, & you’ll answer to GOD . . . sooner or later! This time it was sooner. God is “sending a message” like pitchers sometimes do. [1969 game b/t the Cubs & Mets in NYC. 1st batter up for the Mets, Cubs pitcher threw right @ the man’s HEAD. When METS pitcher threw HIS first pitch, he HIT the lead-off batter in the arm so hard they thought his arm might be broken! The next 3 batters were so scared, he struck ‘em out. Message received. “You keep throwing @ my teammates, and YOUR team will go home w/a lot of sore or broken body parts.

Abram's schemes fail, but GOD intervenes to show us that GOD'S promises depend on no one but GOD.

- **How should we respond to what God does in this Vs? 2 responses.**
 - **The first response is HUMILITY.** God will NOT allow His promises to fail! When the wash is all in, GOD'S plan & GOD' Kingdom will come & GOD'S will will be done NOT because we are such outstanding members of Jesus' All-Star Team, but because GOD will see to it that EVERY plan of His succeeds. God may be pleased to use us; but God doesn't NEED us for His plans to succeed! Sometimes, it's NOT BECAUSE of us, but IN SPITE OF US that God's will gets done. ["I was determined that my children would NOT be weak, wimpy religious people. So . . . All 3 are either pastors or Christian workers!] We're not as big a deal as we like to think we are. God has designed us in such a way where physically we cannot pat ourselves on the back!
 - **The second response is HOPE.** It's it encouraging to KNOW that God's plan to bless the world through us does NOT rest on my fickle and sometimes twisted faithfulness! God's plan will succeed IN SPITE OF ME. In fact, more often than not, I WILL "BLOW" IT! ["The Church's one foundation" #347, Vs 4 . . .] God's POWER ALONE guarantees that God's PLAN will happen!

4. Only God's GRACE can keep us from DISPAIR.

- **What is the shame of Vv 18-20?** The shame does NOT come from GOD! God does NOT say, "Well, ABBY, I should have let you stew in your own juices! Friend, you blew it! Looks like I'll have to find ANOTHER servant to carry my flag into the world." Abraham is forcibly DEPORTED from Egypt, and loses face in the process. His failure is apparent in all the Egyptian Tabloids. People like to HEADLINE our failures! So, there's no sterling, smashing "testimony" or "success story" video to run @ the next church service [like some church's do, "Another (name of church) success story . . . "]
- **What is the 2-fold cure for our shame? (cf 13:1-4)** When we feel like we've "blown it," when we feel like we've failed others and the Lord, WHAT do we DO?
 - **GO BACK to where you STARTED! "@ the first . . . at the beginning . . . "** Abraham goes back to the actual place where his spiritual journey began. Couples sometimes go back to the very church where they took their original

vows and do marriage renewal ceremony. Go back, geographically, to where your Xn journey began (Bay Street; Manse, where a friend of mine & myself went in tears to ask my Daddy what to do about a friend . . . ; First Pres, where I first worked and where Carol & I got married.) In our spiritual journey, places are important. We need to remember those places, go back to those places from time to time, and remind ourselves of what happened at those place. Sometimes, we just need to Hit the reset button. [Lombardi, "Gentlemen, this is a football!"]

- **GO BACK to the ALTAR!** This ACTION is an EXPRESSION of REPENTANCE. The ALTAR is the place where ATONEMENT is made for sin! Abram goes back and reminds himself of God's GRACE to sinners through a SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICE. We can "start over" after we fail b/c Jesus died in our place to forgive us of ALL our sin & give us a new start EVERY TIME we confess our sins and head in the right direction! The CROSS is where we BEGIN our Xn journey; the cross is where we RETURN every time we blow it! God's GRACE demonstrated through the life and death of JESUS motivates us to DO what we need to DO as Xns!

"Revival is not going down the street with a big drum, it's going back to Calvary with a big sob."

– Douglas Brown.

**** WHY is going back to Calvary so important for us? *It's important because Calvary is where our "Promise Keeper" sets His amazing, unbreakable love on often unfaithful promise BREAKERS like us!* **** The CROSS reminds us that Jesus LOVES us, LIVED for us, DIED for us, and b/c of what Jesus has done for us, God NEVER lets go of LOSERS like us!