

\* \* \* \* \*  
PROMISES, PROMISES! Michael B. Beough  
Hebrews 6:13-20; Romans 4:20-22 March 2, 2008  
\* \* \* \* \*

In case you haven't heard, we have a Core Message here at SBPC. It is our answer to the question: What is it about our experience with Jesus Christ that others cannot live without? Our answer is *Peace. Purpose. Promise.* Peace and Purpose were the themes of our two previous Sundays. You can get my sermons on our website.

Today, our theme is Promise. When someone first proposed "promise" as the third element of our Core Message, I wasn't too keen on it. But it has grown on me. **After all, where would we be without promises?** Think about it. All our relationships are based on promises we make to each other. We depend on the promises others make, and they depend on ours.

One of my favorite all-time literary passages is from Thornton Wilder's play, *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Mrs. Antrobus says to her husband, George:

**Mrs. Antrobus:** I didn't marry you because you were perfect. I didn't even marry you because I loved you. I married you because you gave me a promise. (*She looks at her ring and continues.*)

**Mrs. Antrobus:** That promise made up for your faults. And the promise I gave you made up for mine. Two imperfect people got married and it was the promise that made the marriage.

**Antrobus:** Maggie...I was only nineteen.

**Mrs. Antrobus:** And when our children were growing up, it wasn't a house that protected them; and it wasn't our love that protected them — it was that promise. And when that promise is broken — this can happen!

*At this point, Mrs. Antrobus pulls the raincoat off their daughter Gladys to expose her wearing — are you ready for this? — stockings.*

Well, worse things happen when we break our promises. We know how important promises are.

What we are saying is that promise is one of the three most important things we experience with Jesus Christ that others cannot live without. Not the promises we make, but the promises God makes. We want people to know that in Jesus

**We receive promises that will never be broken.  
Promises we can count on, forever!**

**Big promises. Important promises. Eternal promises.  
And in these promises, we experience hope. We live in hope.**

**Know the promises.**

How many promises of God do you think you could name? I tried this and came up with about ten. When I started looking in the Bible, I realized there are far more promises than I could name on my best day. So I am going to suggest a select list under which all the others seem to fall. These might be the most important ones as we share our message of promise and hope with others. That is what a message is for. It is for sharing. So if your neighbor or friend is going through a tough time, maybe even depressed or oppressed, you can help that person by sharing the promises of God. And some of you are doing that. Let me tell you a second hand story. One of our members recently found herself in a hospital room with a young woman who had attempted suicide. As the young woman was ready to be released, our church member told her that God loves her and that God has a purpose for her life. According to the church member, she couldn't believe she was saying this, it was so out of character for her. But this is our message. As it says in Hebrews 6 (The Message), the hope we have in the promises of God is "an unbreakable spiritual lifeline."

Hebrews 6 tells us that God is a Promise-Maker. This characteristic of God goes all the way back to the promise God made to Abraham. Now, this is the Abraham in the first book of the Bible. He is the ancient ancestor of Jesus. God comes to Abraham and says in verse 14 (The Message), "I promise that I'll bless you with everything I have – bless and bless and bless!" Specifically, God promises to give Abraham lots of descendents and lots of land, a place to call home.

But let's look at other ways the Bible speaks of the blessings promised by God.

In Matthew 6:25, Jesus promises his disciples that God will provide for all their needs. He tells them, "do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink . . . or wear." Seek "first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

In Matt 28:20, Jesus tells his disciples, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." I will never abandon.

In I Peter 1:3-4, it says that "By his great mercy [God] has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you . . ."

Isaiah 65:17 sounds a note that plays all the way through the Bible to chapter 21 in the book of Revelation. God promises a new heaven and a new earth where death will be no more, and suffering and pain will be no more.

Then let us look at one more promise. This one is tough but so powerful. In Romans chapter 8, verse 28 (NRSV), the Apostle Paul says, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Based on my study of this text, here is what it really says. "God works all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to his purpose."

Sometimes we read this to mean that even the bad things that happen to us will have good consequences or that we can find some good in them. Or that God lets bad things happen so good can come out of it. I can tell you from experience that that is not the God I know in Jesus Christ. Sometimes, bad things leave me totally confused. Don't ask me to see the good that comes out of a baby dying or a child starving or of my wife having cancer. I don't see it. What the Apostle Paul is saying in Romans 8:28 is that for those who love God and who are called according to his high purpose, we can know that God is still working his purpose out in the world, that the end of suffering will come, that a new creation is on the way, in spite of what it looks like otherwise. Don't give up!

### **Trust the Promise-Maker.**

The good news is that the Maker of these promises is God "who can't break his word." In Hebrews 6:13, "When God made his promise to Abraham, he backed it to the hilt, putting his own reputation on the line." (The Message)

When I was in ninth grade, my dad bought a car for my older sister and me from a used car dealer called Honest Jim. What were we thinking? Well, the price was right for a 1953 Ford with a flathead six engine. The reason I know so much about the engine is that after several months my dad had to completely rebuild it. "Honest" Jim, or maybe the previous owner, had put sawdust in the oil crankcase to keep the pistons from rattling, and Honest Jim refused to take back the car. Honest Jim taught me an important lesson. You can't always trust someone who calls himself Honest Jim. Any time we fall for someone else's promises, we take a huge risk of being disappointed and hurt.

In a world of Honest Jims, it is almost too good to be true, but there is Someone we can trust absolutely with our lives, Someone we can depend on absolutely, Someone who can never break His word. Whatever God promises, God delivers.

How can I be so emphatic about it? The evidence. Abraham "got everything that had been promised to him." I have received everything that

has been promised to me. Not quite everything. I have yet to receive the glorification of my body in the resurrection from the dead, but I can wait. I have known people who have lived powerful lives because of their hope in the promises of God, and whose hope was fulfilled because they stuck it out.

### **Stick it out.**

Hebrews 6 tells us that that was the key to Abraham's life. Was he always a good man? Abraham did some pretty dumb things, but he stayed the course because he trusted the Promise-Maker.

Romans 4:20-21(NRSV) says, "No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

**Sticking it out means patience** – But not simply accepting things the way they are.

Not, "Okay, God, lay it on me. Give me what I want. I'm just going to sit here in my spiritual easy chair and wait for you to drop it in my lap." Or worse, "Okay, God, since I am sick or hurting or desperate or lonely or lost or being abused, it must be your will, so I'll just quietly accept it."

**Sticking it out means keep working** – Abraham kept going. God made the promise, and Abraham got up and went. He left his hometown behind to go where God would lead him. He and his wife Sarah tried having a baby even though she was well past child-bearing age, and God gave them the first child of their many descendents. Abraham kept moving toward the fulfillment of God's promise. And so are we to keep moving. Trusting in the promises of God, we don't quietly accept our suffering as the "will of God." We do what we can to end it. We don't quietly accept the abuse we are getting in our relationships. We do what we can to end it. If God has promised it, we work to make it happen now.

You know, wherever we begin with our Core Message, it always leads to action, or what we call mission. Our message is not one of complacency.

Our Message is about the gifts of a great God whose aim is to use us to put the whole world to rights by serving others in the same way Jesus has served us. In Jesus Christ, God gives us peace, purpose, and promise as the soil out of which we grow into life-breathing agents of the Kingdom of God on earth. And the high octane fuel that keeps our engines burning is our trust in the promises of God.

Hebrews 6 (The Message): "We who have run for our very lives to God have every reason to grab the promised hope with both hands and never let go. It's an unbreakable spiritual lifeline."