

Promises Made, Promises Kept

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm one of the pastors here. It's my joy to bring God's word to you today. We are continuing this morning, really not just continuing, actually we're ending this morning, our series in the book of Genesis.
- Remember the book of Genesis tells the origin story of God's people beginning with Abraham. That's been our focus over the last four or five months to prepare us to do what we're going to do next week, which is to return to our series in Romans.
- We're going to be in Romans chapter 4 where Paul uses Abraham as this example that God's grace is by faith alone. Of course, we've also been asking this question as we go throughout Genesis of what does it look like to follow God in faith.
- Last week we looked at Genesis chapter 24 with Isaac and Rebecca and we saw that God was faithful through generations. That even as Abraham and Sarah exit stage left, God's promises continue.
- We also saw that God was faithful to Abraham, faithful to refine and grow him. That Abraham was more and more obedient as his life went on.
- [1 : 2 0] Here we're in chapter 25, the death of Abraham. We're at the end of the road, so to speak. We're going to focus on two things. First and mostly one final look at God's faithfulness to his promises.
- And also a reminder, as death often reminds us, of a life well lived. So with that, I invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 25.
- If you're new to the Bible, Genesis is going to be very easy for you to find since it happens to be the very first book. And so you just have to open up to the very beginning. You can also turn where it's printed in your worship guide.
- As we come to it, remember that this is God's word. Jeremiah chapter 23 tells us that God's word is a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces.
- It's a way of saying that there is nothing so powerful that it can stand against God's word. So that's why we read now Genesis chapter 25, starting at verse 1.
- [2 : 3 0] Abraham gave all he had to Isaac.
- But to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts. And while he was still living, he sent them away from his son Isaac eastward to the east country.
- Verse 7. These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people.
- Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar, the Hittite, east of Mamre, the field that Abraham had purchased from the Hittites.
- There Abraham was buried with Sarah, his wife. After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac, his son. And Isaac settled at Beer Lahai Roy.

[3 : 56] Verse 12. These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar, the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth.

Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, and Kedar, Abdel, Mibsam, Mishma, Duma, Massa, Hadid, Tema, Jeter, Naphish, and Kedema.

These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names by their villages and by their encampments. Twelve princes according to their tribes. These are the years of the life of Ishmael, 137 years.

He breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people. They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt, in the direction of Assyria.

He settled over against all his kinsmen. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in Heaven, you have promised us in Isaiah chapter 55 that your word does not return to you void, but it accomplishes your purposes.

[5 : 12] So we ask this morning that you would honor that promise here and now, that you would use this passage to accomplish great things in our lives. You would remind us once again of your character, your steadfastness, your love, that you would use it to shape us and form us, that we would grow not merely in knowledge, but we would grow in love.

We'd grow in our love and affection for Jesus Christ. We'd grow in our reverence and our awe for him. We'd grow in our obedience to him. That you would remind us of what matters.

You'd help us to see clearly. Father, that we would worship you more and more. We ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.

Amen. December of 1988 was the next to last month of the eight years of the Reagan administration.

And so as they prepared for the handover in January of 1989, when President George H.W. Bush would take the oath of office, the administration published a 60-page book with four categories and 48 specific areas where Ronald Reagan believed he'd accomplished great things for the American people.

[6 : 37] And the title of that publication was this. Promises made, promises kept. And the point, of course, is to show, at least Ronald Reagan was trying to show, hey, I honored my word.

And that matters because as a voter, you know we are cynical when it comes to politicians. Right? And we're cynical because we've had experience with them. Right?

We know politicians often will say anything to get elected. And then magically, those things don't happen. Right? And so the perception is that politicians are lying.

Reagan, on his way out, wanted to say, look, everything I said, I did. I honored my word. Now, whether he did or not, we'll leave to the historians.

The point is not whether you loved or hated Ronald Reagan. The point is this. As we come to this passage, Genesis chapter 25, the Abraham administration is coming to an end.

[7 : 43] It's coming to a close. But the point is not about Abraham. The point is about God. The final word of Abraham's life, final word of this story, is that God has honored his word.

Promises he's made are promises he's kept. If you've been with us throughout this series for the last several months, you know God's promises are one of the major themes that we've turned to over and over again.

And as we come to this passage, the very structure of the passage points us in that direction one final time. I've told you guys before that I don't want you to just learn things that are in the Bible or about the Bible.

I actually want you to learn how to read the Bible. And so whenever we come across a bookend, I make a big deal about it. And we are coming once again to a bookend.

Abraham's death is in verses 7 through 11. It is enclosed on both sides by genealogy. So it's bookended. It's trapped there, which tells us what the point is meant to be.

[8 : 55] It's pointing us towards the emphasis of this passage. It's telling us, focus on this as you think about Abraham's death.

Focus on the genealogies. Focus on his descendants as his life comes to an end. There's another bookend that's happening, not just in this story, but the entire story.

So this is the end of the Abraham story. Go back with me to the beginning of the Abraham story. Genesis chapter 12. What do you need to become a great nation?

You need people. And how do you get people? You have sons and daughters. Throughout the story, this promise has intensified as three different images were used to represent how many children Abraham would have.

Genesis chapter 13. God says, If you can count the dust of the earth, that's how many kids you will have. Genesis chapter 15.

[10 : 08] He comes to him and says, Look at the sky. Can you number the stars? If you can number the stars, that's how many children you will have.

Genesis chapter 22. He comes back again, repeats the stars, and adds another image. Can you count the sand on the seashore?

If you can, that's how many descendants you're going to have. Dust, sand, stars. As Abraham dies, it is already happening.

He's already multiplying generation by generation. So the point is this. We are given genealogies before Abraham's death and after Abraham's death to remind us God is keeping his promise.

One last time, what we've been told over and over again, we're reminded of once more. Isaac will be the father of many nations.

[11 : 21] Not just the father of Isaac, as many children as the dust, as the stars, as the sand. You might wonder, that's great.

I'm glad that Abraham had lots of kids. What in the world does that have to do with me in Colorado Springs in September of 2025? And it has many things to do with you.

The most important of which is this. It is this promise of many descendants from Abraham that gets us fully and finally to Jesus Christ.

It is because God honors his promise here that he fulfills his promise there. And it's related to another promise, also Genesis chapter 12.

It wasn't just that God was going to make Abraham the father of many nations. No. In you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

[12 : 22] How are all the families of the earth supposed to be blessed? It is not simply by Abraham having lots of kids. No.

The families of the earth are going to be blessed by fulfilling an even earlier promise from Genesis chapter 3 that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.

In other words, all the families of the earth are going to be blessed because one day a descendant of Abraham, that is Jesus Christ, will come. He will live the perfect life that we should have lived.

He will die the death. We deserve to die. He will save his people from their sins. All families of the earth blessed in Christ.

Not merely the Jews. you as well. I've been telling you for weeks now, one of our major questions of Genesis is what does it look like to follow God in faith?

[13 : 31] Following God in faith looks like constantly reminding ourselves of the promise that he has kept in Jesus Christ.

I've said that before over the last number of months. That is the keystone to every other promise.

It is the guarantee of every other prophecy. Romans chapter 8, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Which is a way of saying if God kept his promise about Jesus which he did, of course he will keep every other one.

If he kept the hardest promise, of course he'll keep the easy ones. promise that God kept to Abraham is a promise he has kept to us.

[14 : 49] It's a promise he's kept to you. That is a north star of the Christian life. That's our horizon line as we try to keep big things big and small things small.

I have a friend who I've known for many years who has struggled with a variety of things including his own challenges with depression and at one point he told me basically what it comes down to is this.

When I get up out of bed every morning I answer this question. Did Jesus rise from the dead or did he not?

And if he did, everything else flows from that. Jesus rose from the dead everything else will be okay.

Whenever we're tempted to doubt God's word or to doubt God's goodness we can do one very simple thing.

[15 : 54] We look to God fulfilling his promise in his son and our savior Jesus Christ. that's what it looks like to follow God in faith.

Remember 2 Corinthians chapter 1 tells us all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ. Promises made promises kept.

There's a focus here not just on children in general although that is why we have these bookended genealogies but there's also this special focus on Ishmael in verses 12-18.

It's first the first set we get verses 1-4 is Keturah's children. So apparently Abraham had another wife we find out later in the passage she was a concubine but we end here with this word about Ishmael the special focus which raises the question why is this important as we think about the end of Abraham's life?

Ishmael is important for a couple reasons. One reason is that Ishmael becomes one of the nations. Remember the promise at the beginning in chapter 12 was that Abraham would become a great nation. Later God adds to that.

[17 : 18] He says actually you become many nations. Ishmael is one of that. one of those. Another reason that we've kind of skipped over a little bit because we were focusing on other things is this.

Abraham loves Ishmael. Remember in chapter 21 Isaac is born and there's this rivalry that develops between Isaac and Ishmael.

So Sarah comes to Abraham and she says you have to deal with this Abraham. Abraham. We didn't talk about it at the time because we were focused on God's fulfillment of the promise but in the Hebrew there even more than in the English you can see Abraham is livid.

He's livid at the suggestion that Ishmael would be sent away because he loves him. That's why in that same chapter God has to come to Abraham and say do what your wife has told you to do.

We saw the same thing back in Genesis chapter 17 God comes to Abraham and says look it's Sarah who's going to have a child. And Abraham says yeah but what about Ishmael?

[18 : 23] Sarah's in her 90s. Can't Ishmael be good enough? There's a promise that's repeated multiple times both to Abraham and to Hagar that Ishmael is going to be also the father of a nation.

In fact God tells Hagar Genesis chapter 16 he will have so many children they can't be numbered. So the promise is kept about offspring yes promise also kept about Ishmael.

So we're just going through the list. Every promise God makes he keeps. All the loose ends are being tied up. Promise about the children kept promise about Ishmael kept promise not just about Ishmael but now turn for me for a second promise about the land.

We saw a hint of this chapter 23 with Sarah's death now it comes again here verses 9 and 10. We get to the burial of Abraham where is he buried?

With Sarah in the cave he purchased in the land God had promised. Once again we end where we started.

[19 : 40] Remember Genesis chapter 12 we had the promise great nation we had the promise of great blessing we also had the promise of land. In fact that came first.

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And then the land promise just like all the other promises is repeated over and over again in Genesis chapter 13 and 15 and 17.

and here at the end Abraham is buried in the land God promised to give him. Promises made promises kept.

God has kept his promise about children that they would be as many as the dust and the stars and the sand. God has kept his promises about Ishmael whom Abraham deeply loved.

God has kept his promise about the land. Everything God said he's done. Every promise fulfilled.

[21 : 01] We've talked about the promise of the blessing to all the nations how that overflows to you in Jesus Christ. The promise of the land also comes to you Christian.

Jesus in the New Testament expands the promise of the land from this one specific plot to the entire earth. That's what he teaches in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5 Jesus says this blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

That's the Christian promise the Christian hope that heaven is when God's presence fills not just the promised land not just Jerusalem no the entire world.

Promise of land to Abraham is just the beginning and Abraham himself knew that. Even Abraham was looking beyond this one plot of land to something larger and greater.

Brit read it for us this morning. We talked about it before in our series on Abraham. Hebrews chapter 11. This is on verse 2 of your worship guide. Speaking about Abraham verse 10.

[22 : 20] For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations whose designer and builder is God. mentioned to you just a few minutes ago the north stars of the Christian the things that we fix our eyes on.

One of them is Jesus' death and resurrection. That's a main thing. I wake up every morning. Has Jesus or has he not risen from the dead?

If he has everything else flows from that. But here's another north star we look to the heavenly city to come.

We look to the future that God is preparing for his people. The same place Abraham looked. Abraham's hope was more and greater than one plot of land.

And so for us we look beyond this one story and this one man we look to the same city he longed for.

[23 : 37] Thankfully we don't have to wonder too much about it because God tells us there's another bookend. The Bible begins in Genesis in a garden.

It ends in this city, the city that Abraham looked forward to. The book of Revelation tells us what this city looks like. This is Revelation chapter 21.

verse 1.

behold, the dwelling place of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

[25 : 13] What does it look like to follow God in faith? Christian, it looks like remembering every day two things.

It looks like remembering every day that Jesus Christ did in fact die and rise again from the dead. And that because of that, he will honor every single promise.

It also looks like remembering every single day exactly what your future will be.

And your future will be this, that God will dwell with you, you will be his people, and God himself will be with you as your God.

And your future, like Abraham's, involves God wiping away every tear from your eyes. It looks like death being no more, and it looks like no mourning, no crying, no pain, for the former things have passed away.

[26 : 34] That is what it looks like to follow God in faith. Promises made, promises kept.

If you live with those two things as the horizon line of your life, I promise you, everything else will fall into place.

Those are the north stars of the Christian. Those are how we live life in focus and on mission.

It's how we keep our lives in perspective. In the midst of those, of course, Abraham actually dies.

Verses 7 through 11. We have been with Abraham on a journey. We started with him in chapter 12. We were told he was 75 years old. In chapter 21, when Isaac is born, we're told he's 100 years old.

[28 : 00] And now, verse 7, he's what? 175. Now, our focus has been really on like 40 to 50 of those years.

Obviously, the story spans a full 100. Reminds us again of what I told you last week. All of us, at some point, will exit stage left.

All of us, at some point, end our walk in this world. Following God in faith looks like living with death in mind.

How do we keep our future front and center, that new Jerusalem? Well, we have to remember that what we have here and now is temporary.

And we remember that as and when we think about the day of our death. Christian, are you ready to die?

- [29 : 24] Because, by the way, you will. If you're not a Christian, are you ready to die?
Or are you pretending, living as if, this life will continue forever?
Will you let your death, which will happen, shape your life today? There's an old saying you may have heard that goes like this, only one life will soon be passed.
Only what's done for Christ will last. Another person puts it this way, this is on the back of your worship guide. When life ends or is about to end, absolutely everything else comes into focus.
The things that don't really matter, but which we gave so much time to, now seem so empty and pointless.
- [30 : 45] The lives we touched and the generosity we showed and the love we gave or received now mean so much more.
At the end of a life of great faith, Abraham died. Christian, non-Christian, you will too.
Live like it. In his fantasy series, The Stormlight Archive, Brandon Sanderson introduces us to a character named Terevangan.
And Terevangan is a king who has an unusual problem, which is that his days flip between two things. Some days, he is extremely intelligent.
He's a genius. He's able to think at a level that the rest of us can only imagine. On other days, he's extremely compassionate.
- [32 : 00] He has an empathy that we cannot imagine. But those two things are never true on the same day. So the compassionate days, he's not smart.
The smart days, not so compassionate. And so when he's very intelligent, he realizes he has to prepare himself for the days when he's not. And so on the days when he thinks clearly, when he really sees what matters, he hurries to write down what it is he needs to remember.
He writes this book called The Diagram, which is his plan to save the world. And then on the days he can't think straight, he comes back to it.
Because it reminds him, okay, when I was thinking clearly, this is what I knew had to happen. Now, if you're familiar with the series, you know Teravangan has some ethical problems.
The point, though, is this. He thinks clearly on some days, his mind is muddled on others. What does it look like to follow God in faith?
- [33 : 11] It looks like living with focus on what matters more than anything else. and on the days that we see that clearly, we cling to it.
We write it down. We return to it again and again. And so that on the days when we are filled with doubt and fear and confusion, we return back to what is true.
God has given us, in a sense, our own diagram, the things that we need to cling to more than anything else. That as we're distracted in this world, pulled in so many different directions and loves and affections, we return over and over again to the fact that Jesus has died and risen from the dead.
And we return over and over that no matter what happens now, we know what will happen then. That we will be with God forever as our God.
all I have needed, thy hand have provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.
- [34 : 28] Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you again that you have not left us as orphans in a merciless universe, but you have come and spoken clearly to us in your word that you remind us of what matters.

We ask that you would capture our hearts, that we would look at the right horizon line. We would have the correct north star, that we would return again and again to Jesus and his death and his resurrection, to the future that you hold for us in this world, that it would cause us to walk forward in faith and obedience and love.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.