

THE GOD WHO KEEPS HIS PROMISES

READING

Genesis 13 – Abraham and Lot part ways

INTRO – GLORIFYING GOD

- Queen’s Commendations for Bravery 2021 show three ways that one person’s behaviour can glorify someone else.
 - Shaun Randall – Leicestershire police. Explosion and fire demolished building and killed five. Shaun coordinated the rescue of one man from under rubble, then kept the public back while he crawled into rubble to rescue another young man who was trapped. **The victims’ weakness demonstrated Shaun Randall’s character.**
 - Robert Carr – National Crime Agency. As an armed suspect was fleeing a suspected firearm factory on foot, Robert, who was on a motorcycle, mounted the bike onto a pavement and tripped the suspect as he passed, falling and breaking his own leg in the process. The arrested man was armed, and without this action, a firefight might well have resulted. **The criminal’s wrong actions demonstrated Robert Carr’s character.**
 - All the awards are distributed by the Queen. By recognising the recipients, **she uses her own status to lift them higher.**
- We see all three of these in Abraham’s life – at times, he chooses to glorify God; other times, God’s strength and power is shown through his weakness; at still other times, his sin and failure show God’s goodness.
- Today, we’re looking at how Abraham’s life demonstrates God’s faithfulness to His promises, but we’re also going to look at how we can live lives that glorify God.
- From that list, we want to glorify God in the same way as the Queen did in these awards, or perhaps as the victim did – not the way the criminal did! How we respond to God’s promises affects this! I’m going to go over three choices that Abraham faced, and which we face, when we think about God’s promises. They’re tough choices: you could even call them battles.
- So, we’ll look at three incidents in the life of Abraham, and three battles that he faced which we also face today.

THE PROMISES

Last week, Tim mentioned the promises that God made to Abraham:

1. People – numerous descendants
2. Land – the Promised Land of Canaan
3. Blessing – God’s blessing on Abraham, overflowing to benefit the whole world

THREE BATTLES

1. FEAR OR FAITH?

God had promised Abraham that he’d be a great nation, and that whoever cursed him, God would curse.

In a time of famine, Abraham moved from Canaan to Egypt, where there was food – because of the Nile. [tell story]

- We know that Abraham trusted God’s promises, because he’d migrated over 1000 miles just because God said so.
- So why does he pass off Sarah as his sister? The answer: FEAR. In fact, you can basically divide up the episodes of Abraham’s life into “well done” and “you did *what?*” based on whether or not he acted out of fear.
- Dune (1965/2021) – “Fear is the mind-killer” – more like “the soul-killer”.
- Opposed to love, opposed to faith. **This is the first battle: fear or faith.**

- These promises of God through Abraham to us are constantly challenged by fear:
 - As a householder, I get regular mail about insurance – life insurance, house insurance – the worst is Thames Water home pipes insurance – just a long catalogue of fear.
 - My observation of teenage and student years: so much pressure to be in a romantic relationship, and very quickly a sexual relationship. Much of that pressure is the fear that you'll be left out, that the person you love will be snapped up and you won't meet anyone, that you won't be happy if you don't date someone.
 - Reporting on Ukraine – the press can't leave it alone, even when there's nothing new to report.
- We're constantly under pressure to fear. Ignore for a second whether the fears are reasonable and well-founded – the point is, when we make decisions based on fear, we make bad ones.
 - We sang this morning, "my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness".
 - God, who is the very foundation of the world, is love.
 - So the best basis for making a decision is God – His love, His right standards.

BUT – sometimes those fears become reality. What of the times when we don't see those promises – the homeless, the orphan, the chronically depressed?

2. NOW OR ETERNITY?

Pause and look at the promises God made to Abraham:

- Blessing – yes, but not straightforwardly! Repeatedly made wealthy, helped in battle. But also, there's a famine and he has to move. His herdsmen quarrel with those of his relative. He ends up with one estranged child.
- People – yes, but ...! It's a long time coming, and of his eight children, only one "counts" toward this promise. One child is not a great start towards a "great nation".
- Land – promised all the land he sees, and then even more (Egypt up to Turkey). He dies owning one cave. Not until Solomon, 1200 years later, is this close to being realised: even then, it isn't a straightforward yes.

So did God deliver on His promises?

- Imagine that I promise Élysée that I'm going to make his birthday really special. Then, when the day comes, he wakes up and finds that I'm not around at breakfast for present-opening. If you pause there and ask whether I'm delivering on my promises, the answer looks like a "no". But what if I'm not there because I've headed over to Shotover to set up a massive paintball fight and picnic with all his friends? Then I'm probably keeping my promise, aren't I? And if I was a rubbish Dad, then when I missed breakfast he could reasonably think that I'm just being lame; but if he thinks I'm trustworthy, he's going to be thinking, "it must be something pretty special if he's missing birthday breakfast to sort it out."
- This is what Abraham does – he looks beyond the immediate promises and believes that the promises are further off and much better than they seemed at first. God sends him to the promised land, but when he has the chance to take the best part of it, he doesn't seem to be bothered. "Lot, pick your favourite bit and I'll take the rest."
- Hebrews 11:

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

- Just like in my example, Élysée wouldn't know exactly what was coming – just that it must be pretty good – so, Abraham didn't have a full picture of what the promise would look like. But he got that it wasn't just about him getting to control a large territory.
- This is how Abraham's thinking when he offers Lot first choice of the land. And it's how he *fails* to think when he sleeps with his servant Hagar in order to have a child. **This is the second battle – are our eyes on now, or on eternity?**
- All these promises to Abraham are fulfilled in more amazing ways than you'd think from "land, people, blessing": a heavenly city, the best of all creation, unspoiled; a perfect family of all believers – crossing all boundaries; God Himself in Christ! ("I am your shield – your very great reward" – who wants money if you can have God?)

- God loves to provide, and even to bless generously in this life – some more than others in terms of health, money, comfort. But he wants our eyes fixed on the horizon.

3. YOUR KINGDOM OR OUR KINGDOM?

Then we get to the story of Melchizedek. Lot is living in a city by now, and gets caught up in a massive battle – four kings against five. The locals lose, and Lot gets carried away along with all his family and belongings. Abraham launches a rescue, chases down the invaders, and recovers everyone and everything.

When he returns, Melchizedek the king of Salem, who is also a priest of God Most High (in other words, the true God) comes out and lays out a meal for Abraham and the returning captives, and blesses them – and Abraham, interestingly, gives Melchizedek a tenth of everything he has.

- Why does Abraham do this?
 - He is almost rude to the other kings, but he receives Melchizedek's blessing, and honours him with a tithe.
 - Unlike the other kings, he recognises in Melchizedek the true Kingdom – the Kingdom of God.
 - His gift isn't about earning favour with God, nor is it like paying into a pension. He is giving it to someone who is greater in the same Kingdom as Abraham.
- When we pay taxes, we pay them to our own government – and generally, try not to resent it.
 - They're used to make our "kingdom" work – hospitals, schools, defence, roads, social care.
 - We don't pay taxes to the French or the Azerbaijani governments, because we don't live there.
 - Abraham gives the tenth to Melchizedek because they both belong to the same Kingdom.
- **This is the third battle – to see God's kingdom not just as "your Kingdom, God" but also as "our Kingdom".**
- God has said we will inherit every good thing along with Christ.
 - Wonka's chocolate factory – difference between "take as much as you can grab" and "the factory's yours".
- Jesus makes this point in the parable of the lost son. When the son returns, the older brother gets annoyed at all the celebration, and says to his father, "all this time I've slaved for you, and you've never given me so much as a goat to share with my friends!" The Father's response: "you're always with me, and everything I have is yours, but we had to celebrate."
- We can live life towards God as though obeying him is slavery – we know we have to, but we'd rather not. We know we shouldn't do that, but really we'd like to; we don't really want to say this or give that, but we know we should. And we can end up resenting it.
- God does not just want to give you a goat. Recognise that serving God isn't just about serving his Kingdom, it's about serving our Kingdom: God's the King, but through his generosity, we get to inherit it. Share in his sufferings, share in his glory.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- I want to suggest three quite radical responses to this. These are battles, not games. Pick your battle!
- FEAR: Gub's fear of heights & climbing. Choose to put yourself in a position where the thing you fear losing is very much on the line, and entrust it to God. Fear of running out of money? Give away the savings or the "comfort money": the gap between what you earn and what you need. Fear of losing face? Determine for a week that you will offer to pray with anyone you meet who is upset or sick.
- NOW: Similar to the last. Take note of what is occupying your thoughts, and choose to set it aside. Year of singleness? That work you want done on the house? Take note of the prayers you're praying – are they for health and favour? Instead, set yourself to read Revelation 20 and 21 every day for a month, and ask God to show you the glory of what he's preparing for you.
- YOUR/OUR: This is about a focus on generosity towards God. What are the things about living for God that you like the least? How could you turn those on their heads and make them areas in which you love to honour him? Example of starting to give to UCCF, changing heart towards them.
- Bring it back to the start – God deserves glory, and we want to glorify him through faith, obedience, seeing him work in our weakness.