

February 11, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Communion
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Genesis 28:15.

1. How many of God's promises can you think of at a moment's notice?
2. How has God kept His promises in your life?
3. Can you think of any promises that it would appear that God has not kept?
4. Why is it important to remember the character of God when you think of God's promises?
5. What are the two overriding promises from God that we considered in this sermon?

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES **Genesis 28:15**

It appears that some people are quite surprised, and not particularly happy, that President Trump is carrying out many of the promises he made while he campaigned for the office. This is radical! Who ever heard of a politician doing what he or she promised to do while on the campaign trail?

We have learned too many times, and often at steep costs, that a promise is only as certain as the character of the person who makes it. When I was connected with the construction business, I learned that many suppliers didn't deliver when they said they

would, and too many sub-contractors didn't do what they promised to do or for the price they promised to do it.

Sadly, I have also learned from the "church business" that people in that arena are also quite slack concerning their promises. Quite honestly, if I invite someone to attend services with me and they say, "I am going to do it," I don't believe them. I suppose if I invited someone to church and they showed up the next Sunday, I would be shocked.

Sadder still is the other side of that coin. Too many pastors are no better at keeping their promises than the people who don't show up. I tell our missionaries to try not to get frustrated when pastors don't get back with them like they promised to do. I'm not sure what the problem is with all those other pastors, but I know that I have the valid excuse of forgetfulness that causes me to break my promises.

Now God, He's different. He keeps His promises. Have you ever been in trouble only to have a sincere saint show up and remind you that God keeps His promises? Such intended encouragement might have sounded trite at the time. But God does keep His promises. That is one of the few certainties we have in life. However, it is also possible that you doubt God's promises. Maybe you feel like His promises are for people like you, but not for you in particular. Or you think that God has somehow overlooked you, or that He stopped caring. Those conclusions can be the result of not understanding the nature of God's promises and the essential certainties of God's promises.

God gave an important promise to Jacob. We have the advantage of history to prove that God kept the promise He gave. Let's be encouraged to remember that God keeps the promises He gave to us.

God Promises to Keep His Servant.

The "somewhat" servant was in trouble. I call Jacob a "somewhat" servant because he was a servant of God according to God's plan, but Jacob didn't realize it. Instead of acting like a servant of God, Jacob was self-absorbed. In his opinion, he was king of his life. And as king, he messed things up royally. He lied,

cheated, and stole from his brother. Finally his brother Esau vowed to kill the guy.

Like most self-absorbed, spoiled boys would do, Jacob ran for his life.

We find him in our text leaving Beesheba headed north for Haran. He was going back to the land his grandfather Abraham had come from as he obeyed God. It was a journey of 550 miles. I would assume that where we find Jacob in verse 11 was his second stop in the trip. That is because the town he stopped in was named Luz and was located about 30 miles from Beersheba. We learn in the story that Jacob called it the place Bethel, which means “the House of God.” He came to that conclusion because there he learned that he was God’s chosen servant.

Jacob was like a lot of people who grew up in homes where the parents serve God. We were familiar with “God talk,” “God walk,” and all kinds of “God stuff.” But until God caused us to see that He is Master, we were quite content to be the kings of our own lives. Sadly, many so-called servants of the Lord really are not servants because they are content to be religious while they keep control of their lives.

At Bethel, Jacob met his Master. God graciously sent a life-changing dream to Jacob. Granted, trying to sleep with a stone as a pillow might cause you to have strange dreams. But God authored this dream about God’s angels climbing up and down a ladder that reached into the heavens (28:12). We should not expect God to reveal Himself in dreams because He has revealed Himself to us in His Word. Jacob didn’t have a Bible. And if he would have had one, I doubt he would have read it.

In the dream Jacob met God. Just before the verse of our text we read, “*And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, ‘I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac’*” (v.13a). Here Jacob met God who is Yahweh. We cannot make too much of the character traits that come with this name. God reveals His character and works in His various names. This name speaks of God’s eternal nature, power, and authority.

To Moses, God explained the meaning of this name He had used for many years. The LORD appeared to Moses in the burning bush, which obviously attracted Moses’s attention. *When the*

LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:4-5).

In that setting, God identified Himself. *And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.* (Exodus 3:6). When Moses queried how he should introduce this “God of your fathers” to the Israelites, God explained: *God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’”* (Exodus 3:14). Identifying Himself as Yahweh the God of the Israelites, God pointed out that He exists. He has always existed and always will. He alone depends on no one or nothing for existence. Therefore, He has all power and all authority. He who is all authoritative can “send” anyone He chooses to do His will. And His will is accomplished every time.

This all-powerful, all-authoritative God who can accomplish whatever He promises sent Moses to His people who should remember who and what He is. *God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations”* (Exodus 3:15).

This is the God of Jacob’s ancestors. He is the God of Abraham, whom, He called, saved by grace, and sent into the land. And to Abraham this God promised Isaac and delivered the promised son. And also to Abraham this God promised the land. He is also the God of Isaac to whom He also promised the land and the lineage. This great God gave promises to Jacob. He repeated the promise He had given to Abraham and Isaac. “*The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring*” (v.13b). God continued the promise He had already given to Abraham and Isaac. Too bad God didn’t keep this promise. It is true that God did actually create a huge nation from Abraham as He promised to do. And it is also true that God did actually deliver the promised land to the nation of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But Jacob’s “offspring” continually rebelled until finally God drove them out

of the land. End of story?

If that were the end of the story, it would look a lot like Moses's argument with God at the Golden Calf incident. In that situation, Jacob's offspring rebelled and created a false God. God told Moses He was going to destroy them and start over with a nation out of Moses's lineage (Exodus 32:10). Moses argued that doing so would cause the Egyptians and other surrounding nations to conclude that God was not powerful enough to keep His promises (Exodus 32:12-13). So God didn't. He just slowly killed all those rebels in the desert and gave the promise to their children forty years later.

Some people conclude that God is actually fulfilling His promise to Jacob spiritually. No, there is no actual land; and no, God is not working with actual offspring of Jacob. But the Church is the new nation of God and heaven is the promised land. But then we wonder why Israel is still hanging around, and if it isn't possible that God will give these actual offspring of Jacob the actual land He promised in a future kingdom?

This great God gave a promise specifically for Jacob. *"Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go"* (v.15a). This amazing and mighty God promised to be with Jacob. That is the promise of God's presence. It is a promise of God's blessing. Furthermore, this amazing and mighty God promised to keep Jacob. No doubt Esau could have hunted Jacob down and killed him. I wonder what kept him from doing that? How did Jacob manage to make that 550 mile trip on foot without being robbed, beaten, murdered, eaten by beasts, or starving? How amazing that a man can show up with no job and no money, work for seven years for just a wife, and yet become fabulously wealthy! Jacob and his adversaries all recognized that God was with him.

This amazing and mighty God promised to accompany Jacob wherever he went. But "wherever" Jacob went was not always pleasant. It would appear that his life was a long series of unfortunate events. At age 130 he confessed to Pharaoh, *"The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their*

sojourning" (Genesis 47:9).

So was God with Jacob like He promised He would be or not? Did God keep him? Did God go with Jacob to protect him? In short, did God keep His promises to Jacob? If so, why was his life not a pleasant walk through a beautiful rose garden down by the pond?

God Promises to Complete His Promises.

The personal pronouns found in God's promises to Jacob establish the guarantee behind the promises. See how many times God appealed to Himself. *"Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you"* Several times God plainly stated the personal pronoun that appeals to Himself: *I am with you; I will not leave you; I have done; I have promised.* Such personal reference is also implied: *"I will keep you . . ."* *"I will bring back . . ."* Plus see God's appeal to Himself in verse thirteen: *"I am the LORD; I will give to you."* Eight times in these two statements that make up one promise, God appealed to His own character as the guarantee that He will do what He promises.

This reminds us that the LORD's person and reputation is at stake when He makes a promise. He must keep His promises. He does keep His promises. It's just that we don't always understand God's way.

Let's make some application of these lessons we have learned. As in the case with God's promises to His servants throughout history, all of God's promises to us work for good. It seems like we should be able to boil down all of God's promises to one overriding principle: *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:28-29).*

Simply stated, all of God's promises must work out for our good. All of God's promises must work out according to His

purposes. And all of God's promises must work to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. Therefore, He whose general promise is to give us the desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4), also allows us to suffer want. He who promises to watch over us like a loving father cares for his son, also allows us to suffer. He who promises to sustain us on our sickbed and restore us to health (Psalm 41:3), also allows His choice servants to get sick and die. Sometimes what God knows is bringing about "good" in our lives doesn't look like "good" to us.

We must realize that all of God's promises are fulfilled within the scope of two promises. First is our Lord's promise that He will always be present with us. The writer to the Hebrew Christians reminds us, *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).*

Let's see how that works. When Jacob was being cheated, threatened, lied about, and chased, God never left him. When you and I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, our Good Shepherd is there with us because that is what He promised. When life goes haywire and we really do not know what to do, God is present. When the furnace of affliction seems to be getting hotter than we can bear, God is standing beside us, watching us, with His hand on the thermostat. When God is carrying out His promise to make us like Jesus Christ, He is present with us. Troubles and trials do not mean that God has left us. He is present with us as He is making us like Christ.

The second overriding promise is that He will always give us grace. Paul was one of God's choice servants. God Himself sent trial into His servant's life. Read the list of trials Paul endured according to 2 Corinthians 11 and remember that we would have quit long ago.

Who gave the "thorn in the flesh" to Paul? Listen to Paul's testimony.

So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made

perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

We see here that Paul begged God to take the thorn back. God said He would not. But God promised grace so that Christ's power would be evident in Paul. Isn't that what Romans 8:29 promises? While God is working out the promise of "good" in our lives, He is granting us His grace to endure.

God is almighty, all powerful, always present. He makes promises and never fails to keep His promises. We often choose to look only at the pleasant side of God's promises. Ultimately, the perfect and pleasant part of the promises we will enjoy in eternity. For now, we are being conformed to Christ, which often leaves us drawing heavily on the two-fold promise that God is present and that His grace is sufficient.