

“God’s Promise” – Candace Wells

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Second Sunday After Pentecost

I am a huge fan of the ABC show Scandal. The premise of the show is that the main character, Olivia Pope, is a “fixer”. She and her team work with high ranking political officials, the media and business executives, to resolve scandals before they reach the public. Early in the 1st season, Olivia hires a woman named Quinn. As they are searching for a missing client, Quinn tells the client’s father, “Everything is going to be fine, I promise”. Olivia pulls Quinn to the side and firmly tells her “...don’t ever promise an outcome we can’t deliver.”

In the same way,

I decided to focus mainly on the passage in the liturgy: Genesis 21:8--21.

God will never make a promise that He will not keep. God always keeps his promises.

This passage introduces us to the feud between Abraham’s sons Ishmael and Isaac. The story begins in Genesis chapter 12 in the Sumerian city--state Ur in ancient Mesopotamia.

Abram, who was one of its citizens, heard the voice of a new God, Yahweh, tell him what we see in:

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD said

to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives

And from your father’s house,

To the land which I will show you;

And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you,

And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

And I will bless those who bless you,

And the one who curses you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

At this time, Abram was 75 years old and had no children. Although he could leave his country and his family, how could God make him a great nation with no children. So Abram and his wife, Sarai, decide that od couldn't have possibly been talking about Sarai having children, they decided Abram should have a child with Sarai's servant Hagar in Sarai's name. In their minds that child who we now know was Ishmael would be the promised descendant of Abram.

If we fast forward 24 years...

In Genesis

17:1--8

Now when Abram was ninety--nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him,

“I am God Almighty;

Walk before Me, and be blameless.

“I will establish My covenant between Me and you,

And I will multiply you exceedingly.”

Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you,

And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.

“No longer shall your name be called Abram,

But your name shall be Abraham;

For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.

I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you.

I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your [h]descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Note: The name Yahweh is translated into the words "I AM". This word is derived from the origin El meaning God in Hebrew.

After 24 years of not receiving the promise that God gave him, Yahweh finally decided to establish the promise and bless them with Isaac. The key in this passage is that God changed Abram and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah. The significance of this name change is clearly seen in the Hebrew where there the plural for God which is Elohim is intertwined in their names to let them know that God would always be with them and He would keep His promise.

Even after this name change and the confirmation of the promise, Abraham has a difficult time believing it. In verses 17-19, it says he laughed to himself and couldn't believe that he and Sarah could have a son at that age. So he asks God to just bless Ishmael to follow Him, but God is refuses saying that Isaac will be the promised son.

There are times when we see promises in Scripture, but cannot see them working in our lives. I would like to encourage you by letting you know that God always keeps His promises and He is powerful enough to do what He promised.

In chapter 21 Isaac is finally born. God begins to fulfill His promise to Abraham.

Genesis 21:8

The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.

This was a time for celebration because of the high infant mortality rate. The fact that Isaac made it to his toddler years was a great blessing. During this celebration, verse 9 tells us Ishmael was mocking Isaac. The Hebrew word used here denotes ridicule not just simple mocking. As a result, Sarah has Abraham drive Hagar and Ishmael out of their home. Although this action seems to be cruel and unnecessary, Sarah is clearly in line with God's will.

That fact is evident in verse 12 because God tells Abraham that through Isaac his descendants will be named, meaning Isaac was the child of the covenant. Although Abraham was removing Ishmael and Hagar from the home, God assures Abraham that He would make Ishmael a great nation.

There are many times that we take something that God says and we run with it. We feel like we know God's limits so we act accordingly to help Him out. We let Him know that we'll take it from here, thanks for the information God. We make mistakes all along the way. We don't reach our full potential in that time, but God shows us here with Ishmael that He will keep His promises even in our mistakes.

Ishmael marries an Egyptian woman and eventually becomes the father of 12 sons just as his nephew Jacob. Although God kept a part of his promise with Abraham with his great-grandsons who became the 12 tribes of Israel, the greater part of the promise is revealed many generations later.

In the latter part of the promise, Genesis 12:3 it says:

And I will bless those who bless you,

And the one who curses you I will curse.

And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Throughout the Old Testament, we see the promise unfolding. There were countless nations that were cursed and blessed

based on their interactions with the 12 tribes of Israel. As time progressed, although Egypt, Assyria, Edom, Midian and many others tried to destroy them. The Israelites continued to grow and multiply.

Matthew 1 shows us where the greatest blessing of the promise comes.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,

Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,

Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

Solomon the father of Rehoboam,

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,

Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

Uzziah the father of Jotham,

Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,

Manasseh the father of Amon,

Amon the father of Josiah,

and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

After the exile to Babylon:

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

Abihud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

Azor the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Akim,

Akim the father of Elihud,

Elihud the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Jesus was the incarnation and the final piece of God's promise. Everything that the promise meant was made complete in Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection.

Jesus' death was not just a symbol. It was not only God

showing us how to live. It was God giving us life, abundant and eternal.

When mankind was created, they were perfect. They chose to disobey, as we do.

Romans 3:23: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Because God is just, the offense of disobedience and the many others that we commit have to be paid for. Now we cannot choose the price, we have to look to the judge God and his law.

Romans 6:23 tells us that price: Since God is righteous and perfect, He requires perfection. Our imperfection disqualifies us from heaven and fellowship with God. According to Romans 6:23 we would be doomed to an eternity separated from God, except

He made a way for us to have a relationship with Him.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

The death of Christ was different from all other political and spiritual leaders of the past. In that His death paid the penalty that God required because He was perfect and sinless.

I Peter 3:18: For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

Christ's death on the cross is the bridge between us and God. It is the only way that we can be reconciled to God. It is only way that we can have a relationship or closeness with him.

We cannot work our way into heaven. Although God desires that we do good in the world. It does not make us righteous or

worthy of an eternity with Him.

Isaiah 64:6

Isaiah 64:6: For all of us have become like one who is unclean,

And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;

And all of us wither like a leaf,

And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

There is nothing we can do on our own to earn righteousness. Christ did all that we need.

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

The key in this passage is believing in Christ. Believing that Christ died for you and I giving us an opportunity to have a relationship with Him for eternity.

Christ's death made the way, but it is up to each one of us to believe that it is true and accept Christ's death as our payment to God for our sins.

Romans 10:9 ...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

Once we have accepted that payment for our sins, God promises that we will have eternal life with Him.

The promise God gave to Abraham was incredible because the blessing that we can receive from it is far beyond what Abraham

could have imagined. God promised that all the families of the world would be blessed. That blessing comes through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which allows us to have a relationship with God. This blessing has been offered to all of us, it is our responsibility to accept it which is a free gift from God. He is always there waiting for you please say Yes to Him.