

01-12-14 – Our God is a Promise Keeper

Exodus 3:1-5

Illustration: W.A. Criswell tells of an ambitious young man who told his pastor he'd promised God a tithe of his income. They prayed for God to bless his career. At that time he was making \$40.00 per week and tithing \$4.00. God did just that and in a few years his income increased and he was tithing \$500.00 per week.

He called the pastor to see if he could be released from his tithing promise, it was too costly now. The pastor replied, "I don't see how you can be released from your promise, but we can ask God to reduce your income to \$40.00 a week, then you'd have no problem tithing \$4.00."

Illustration: Ann Landers had an interesting letter in her column. It was from a girl who was writing about her uncle & aunt. She said, "My uncle was the tightest man I've ever known. All his life, every time he got paid he took \$20 out of his paycheck & put it under his mattress.

Then he got sick and was about to die. As he was dying, he said to his wife, "I want you to promise me one thing." "Promise what?" she asked. "I want you to promise me that when I'm dead you'll take my money from under the mattress & put it in my casket so that I can take it all with me."

The girl's letter went on with the story. "He died, and his wife kept her promise. She went in and got all that money the day he died and went to the bank and deposited it. She then wrote out a check and put it in his casket."

BACKGROUND:

As we all know - - Joseph arranged for the Hebrew people to escape the famine in Egypt with Pharaoh's consent. Egypt was a great place to escape the famine, but it was not what God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their Land.

Things were going along well until a new Pharaoh took the thrown and realized that the Israelites were multiplying like rabbits in Egypt. In his paranoia, he ordered them to become work slaves to the Egyptians to keep them humble and under control. Some of you may feel this way in your current jobs. However, the Israelites were multiplying and the king got fearful that they would join up against Egypt if there were an invasion since they were outsiders and not native Egyptians.

In order to control their population, Pharaoh ordered that all male Hebrew children be left to die at birth. It was at this time in history that Moses was born – coincidence? I think not!

Now Watch for God's Sense of Humor ...

So Moses' mother gives birth and the mid-wives don't let him bleed out (not tying the cord). But – the problem remains – No Male Hebrew children can survive. They make a waterproof basket and place Moses in it and place it at the bank of the Nile River. Pharaoh's daughter comes to the river and discovers the baby. Moved with compassion (I wonder who set this up) – she takes the baby in as her own and Moses becomes a member of Pharaoh's household. In order to feed him, they order the baby's mother to come to feed him and get paid for it – Is God way cool or what? So Moses is raised as an Egyptian for 40 years with all the perks – education – prestige – servants – respect – Royalty.

Maybe they told him where he was from or maybe it was just something God instilled in him. However, Moses seemed to become very patriotic for Israel as he grew up. He witnessed an injustice between a Hebrew and an Egyptian, and he killed the Egyptian (what?) and buried him in the sand. Moses had the right intent, but he was too impetuous. He had the traits of leadership, but it was uncontrolled.

He was not acting under his Egyptian authority and he knew what he was doing was wrong. – He didn't just kill this Egyptian; he murdered him. V. 2:12 – says... Moses looked this way and that, and when he saw no one looking, he killed him and buried him in the sand.

So Mo fled into the wilderness where he was in training for another 40 years. God had a plan, but Mo had a lot to learn in order to be ready for the real call of God on his life.

Did God forget His promise to the ancient fathers?

During this time he defended maidens and stood up for the Hebrews. He met and married Zipporah, and raised a family. He was a shepherd for his father-in-law's flock and diligently worked for him.

Then one day – one ordinary day – with all things going along as normal – seemingly out of the blue ...

Exodus 3:1-5:

One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai (or Horeb), the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. 3 "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."

4 When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

"Here I am!" Moses replied.

5 "Do not come any closer," the Lord warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.

A few cool things happened in this scene... The bush was burning but it was not getting consumed. Are any of you pyromaniacs like me and my sons? We love to build fires (controlled, of course – most of the time). However, one of the problems with building cool fires is that the wood burns up and you need to keep fueling it. That can be discouraging and tedious. This bush burned in raging fire, but it didn't consume the wood of the bush – it just burned – like a gas fire place with fake logs.

This was out of the ordinary and very intriguing to Moses. He immediately took notice and turned to assess the situation. (God got his attention – that was the intent).

Moses decided this deserved a closer look – AND – When God saw Moses coming to take a closer look He called to him “Moses, Moses.” What has God been throwing in your path to get you to take a closer look? Is He trying to get your attention? Are you looking at the extra-ordinary and taking a closer look? Or – are you ignoring the signs in your path and moving forward in your own strength and might? Maybe God is trying to get your attention, so He can relate to you in a new and more powerful way.

What made this Holy Ground? Was it the place – the bush – the ground itself? NO! There is nothing special about the material space and surroundings! This is the same place and bush where the little animals were just relieving themselves moments earlier. There is nothing special about the place except that God manifested His presence there – in the bush.

It's a lot like Holy Communion. The bread and wine (matzo and grape juice) are not holy unto themselves. They are not holy because we use them in this building called the church. They are not holy at all if you are not also part of this sacrament in spirit. They are holy because we pray for God to consecrate them and sanctify them (set them apart as holy for this specific purpose). So when we receive Holy Communion together the way we do – it is a holy sacrament. The grace of God and Glory of God are manifest in this sacrament because of God not us only. This is why we take this sacrament so seriously and why we insist that our children take a class, so they understand the significance and importance of Holy Communion before we offer them this sacrament. We hope you support us in this.

Has God promised you something in the past, but you just haven't seen it happen yet? Is that frustrating you and making you turn away or at least think – the promise is dead or wasn't real to begin with? He hasn't forgotten you either, although we are talking about a much larger promise here.

If God made the promise, He will never forget or forsake that promise. He will bring it to fruition in the proper time (**kairos**).

The bush in our text was most likely a thorn bush and may represent fallen man in a sinful state, some say. God's presence in the bush is the Holy Spirit preserving sinful man by His grace; it was not consumed. If that's too difficult for you to accept, then we'll ratchet it down a bit.

God called and used Moses to deliver the people of God from slavery and usher them into the Promised Land. The people cried out to God for deliverance in their oppressed situation. There was a promise for a land flowing with milk and honey made to the patriarchs, but this had not been seen. The Hebrew people were in Egypt for 430 years. During the famine years of Joseph's time, this may have seemed like

the Promised Land, but it was not. They were preserved during the famine, but then things eventually changed for the bad. They were now despised and considered the enemy by current leadership.

So while Mo was in the wilderness in the school of “hard knocks,” he married and had a family of his own, but all the while he was learning and growing as a servant of the Lord without knowing it. Moses was the one God chose to fulfill God’s promise made over 400 years before. The people of God needed a deliverer, a savior. Moses was that savior for the Israelites.

If we look to the previous chapter, we see a significant verse that sheds light on all this. In **Ex. 2:24-25 - ²⁴ God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. ²⁵ So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.** (NIV)

This was not just a mental act, but it included performance on His Word!

God doesn’t forget His promises. He just operates in a different time frame than we expect or desire. If God promises it, He will fulfill it – ALWAYS.

So God called Moses to fulfill His promise and deliver the Hebrew people from Egypt to the Promised Land. His mission was successful because God was with him. However it took over 400 years for the fulfillment to happen.

God established in **Gen. 17:7 – “I will establish my Covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you.”** A Permanent promise! Thank God for that.

However, all of humankind needs a deliverer and a savior to rescue us from our slavery to sin and bring us to a Promised Land – Eternal Life with God. God promised this as well.

“Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. (Mal. 3:1 – NLT)

So God fulfilled His promise to us all by coming in flesh in the person of Jesus Christ to deliver us from the oppression of slavery to sin and be forgiven and reconciled back to God. This was also prophesied hundreds of years ahead of time – in fact, it is part of the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. God would send Messiah – the Christ – the anointed One – to redeem the faithful and deliver the oppressed.

Gal. 4:4 - **But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law.** NLT

Our God is a Promise Keeper. Jesus was born at just the right time – God incarnate! Our Savior.

God is still a Promise Keeper - - - We await the second coming of Jesus in great power and Glory. Are you waiting in anticipation for this? We all should. The problem is that when a promise doesn’t happen when we expect, we think it’s dead in the water, but not with God who is our Promise Keeper.

⁶ Then he said, “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God...

¹³ Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘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,
the name you shall call me
from generation to generation. (NIV)*

I Am – not I was or I will be – although all tenses belong to God, but He revealed his name to us as I Am. He is always present tense – no matter when in history – we serve a living God Who is always present. Therefore His promises are always current. If He promised it then, He still promises it now! It doesn't matter how long it takes to be fulfilled. It took 430+ to fulfill the promise the Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It took several hundred years to fulfill the coming of Jesus at least. And we are 2000 years plus waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise of Jesus second return. It will happen, whether we see it in our lifetime or not, it will happen. It is a sure thing because God promised it and He always fulfills His promises as we have seen today. So be encouraged. God is faithful even if He is not operating in our time frame. It's not up to us to know when although many have tried to figure it out.

Acts 1:7-11

⁷ He (Jesus) replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰ As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

Are you ready? Do you believe the promise? Really? Our God is a Promise Keeper!