

“Promises, Promises, Promises”
Sermon for 6 November 2016
Text: Galatians 3:15-18

The promises of God, all made with Christ before the beginning of anything (as in prior to creation even) fall into two main groups. The first are the promises of God made to Abraham upon the call of Abram our to Chaldea and reiterated on numerous occasions (on his parting with Lot, in his old age (and thought that Eliezer would be his heir!), just prior to the covenant of circumcision and, again upon the occasion of acting to offer up his son Isaac which act was not required of him only the willingness to obey God in the offer. This first group of promises, largely temporal, included a covenant to bless His people: the blessing, the withholding of no good thing, the sanctifying of all their afflictions, support under them for testing and trial and the promise to never leave or forsake them. All these were summed up under the banner: God will be their God and they shall be His people. This same catalogue of blessings was recovered to them through the Exodus in the times of Moses whom God appointed (and anointed) to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt, bringing them, many years later, to the very edge of the Promised Land. Moses, due to some anger management issues (that never went away) was excluded from entering the Promised Land and died and was buried on Mount Nebo. It was left for his successor Joshua to cross over the Jordan and to enter in! Moses' end was sad, lonely and personally disappointing but he was faithful in what it had been appointed for him to do.

The second group of promises are of a more spiritual nature. They include the promise of Christ as Savior and Redeemer, of the Spirit as our Sanctifier, and the applier of grace, the impart-er of justification (by Christ's own righteousness), the pardon of His atoning blood, the adoption of grace and mercy, preservation and perseverance in grace, victory over sin, flesh, the world and the Devil; all crowned with resurrection unto eternal life in full communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These blessings were made from all eternity: yes, the grand promises of everlasting life, before the world began; something mediated by Christ in the fulness of time, was promised long before Abraham—or any of his spiritual seed! Yes, before there was any single person, or mere creature, with whom said covenant might be made. So it was made solely with Christ, the head and representative of the whole election of grace! These promises were declared and manifested through the covenants and their promises as made to the Lord's friend and servant, Abraham. Hence our title: “Promises, Promises, Promises”!

This is the substance of the truth that Paul wishes to convey to the Galatians! Some many pages have been written about the argument Paul makes here—is it a mistake, a regressive foray into rabbinical instruction in which Paul had so excelled in his life as Saul, the Pharisee or Pharisees (student of the great Gamaliel and all that)? Now I find that odd because Paul was not writing to Jews at all and why he would want to drag them into the arcane debates of squabbling rabbis is beyond me. His point seems to be to tell the Galatians that when the promises were made to Abraham, Christ was fully in the loop. Not only as the fulfillment of those promises, the great and final culmination(!), but also in the inception of those promises. God, as it were, dealt him in completely, from before time even.

The second truth that Paul wished to convey has to do with electing grace—the path was to be one of confinement and exclusion. One branch of the family (say, Isaac and not Ishmael; Jacob and not Esau; Judah and not the other eleven tribes and so on down to David and not his brothers, even to Jesus and not his brothers and sisters) would be the seed of promise. God is sovereign and He will do it his way: **I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.** Furthermore, the line would be preserved all the way from Abraham to Jesus in the same electing, discriminating and elective manner. Only a portion of the posterity of any man would be the seed bearer—which explains why attempts were made to eliminate the entire Jewish race, why Herod the Great would order the slaughter of all male children (two years old and younger—Matthew 2:13-23) to insure the succession of his three sons. It is worthy of note, in passing, that King Herod's caper was not the first that a despotic ruler tried to serve Satan by exterminating the "seed." Pharaoh (Ahmose) tried the same approach in the days of Moses—Moses escaped the edict of infanticide—and grew up to be the great deliverer of the Hebrew nation, the once and future Israel. Later the religion of Molech would imitate this perversity (through religion) and, currently, the United States is doing the same through social policy and abortion rights. It is awful the way that the seed of Satan stick to the same murderous agenda. (I long for the day when it would be political suicide to promote the wanton slaughter of infants.)

Now electing grace is a difficult doctrine for some people. Especially for some who have not considered the career, say, of Joseph the son of Jacob, from beginning to end; that is, from his foolish over-sharing of big dreams with his jealous brothers (particularly when he was plainly the favorite son)! From there he is threatened with murder, treated to attempted murder, stripped and pitched into a dry cistern, then sold into slavery, purchased by Potiphar and sexually tempted by Potiphar's wife—and, for refusing her advances, gets thrown into prison! He is abandoned, orphaned and afflicted—then forgotten by fellow prisoners whom he helped (through dream interpretation that he credited God for!). He endures an extremity of evil from family, friends and foes—a lot of negativity to go through in a single life. And yet he sums all that apparent evil and mistreatment up: **You intended it for evil, but God purposed it (or worked it all) for good . . . that many lives might be saved.** The alternative to God's governance of such matters is, frankly, accidental causation, or chance—a much more discomfoting thought. Either God is the God of history or the Bible is mistaken in its treatment of His role in human events. Electing grace means that God kept the seed of the promise intact through all the generations of mankind up until its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Without that we would have no redemption, no justification and no hope! No Lord and Savior of us all! And then, after limitation after limitation, throughout time, we finally come to Christ who is the new head of a new people, a spiritual family to which we belong. We are His people and He is our God.