

Living in Awe of God's Promises sermon

1/27/2019

I read recently that over 1 billion dollars in gift cards go unspent every year. Think about that. The money has already been spent, all it takes is for the recipient to go and use it, and yet many choose not to. Many forget they have it in their possession and others simply never get around to using it.

The same could be said for God's many promises to His children. In Scripture there are over conservatively over 3,000 promises God has made and yet sadly, many of them fail to every get cashed in.

Considering God's promises for our lives seems like the logical next step in our series of Living in Awe of God. Because last week the topic was "Living in Awe of God's Character". And one of the things that makes God's promises to us unique is because we can absolutely rely on His promises being carried out. I would venture to say that there is quite likely no one who's ever lived who has kept 100% of the promises they have made during their lifetime. Not necessarily because they are flippant about it, but because as humans we are limited in our capability to carry out these promises. Things happen that interrupt our best intentions and prevent us from carrying out our promises.

But as we were reminded last week, God is **all-powerful**, which means nothing can prevent him from fulfilling His promises. He's also **trustworthy** and **unchanging** which means He's not going to promise one thing today and then change His mind tomorrow. And God is **loving** and **generous**, which means that He wants to bless us with his many blessings.

Understanding God's Promises:

1. **Some of God's promises are unconditional:** (God's promise to Abraham)

Genesis 12:2-3 (NIV) *"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* There's nothing Abraham had to do to receive this promises. It wasn't conditional upon Abraham's response. God just said, this is what I'm going to do for you.

2. **Some of God's promises are conditional:** They require a response for their fulfillment

Acts 2:38 (NIV) *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

According to Peter, in order to receive the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives they needed to respond to Christ's death on the cross for their sins by repenting of their sins and being baptized. Other scriptures confirm that being baptized was an individual's outward demonstration of them putting their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. And so, for many of God's promises it's important to realize whether or not they require a personal response by you in order to claim that promise.

3. **Some of God's promises are limited to certain people and others are universal in scope.**

Like the two examples above. The promise God made to Abraham was specific to him but Peter's expression of God's promise in Acts 2:38 is made to anyone who chooses to respond to God's gift of grace through Jesus. Similarly, when God promised Abraham and Sara and Zechariah and Elizabeth that they would have babies in their advanced age, that's not necessarily a promise that can be claimed by every elderly couple that God desires for them to have a baby at an advanced age. But the vast majority of God's promises are made to everyone.

Key verses about God's promises

2 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV) *His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.* These verses claim that God has equipped us with everything we need to live a godly life. And that these resources largely come through God's many promises. But what's the ultimate goal of God's many promises? To make us wealthy or successful by worldly standards or popular? No, the specific goal for God's giving us His promises is that *we might participate in the divine nature*. In essence that means living the kind of life, in connection with God, that He's always designed us to live. That may not mean having all of your personal desires fulfilled for comfort and health and wealth etc. What it does mean, I believe, is that God has equipped us to live a life giving honor and glory to God through our lives. That might mean in good times as well as difficult times. I think where many people go awry in claiming God's promises is that want to merely use them for their own comfort and success. James addresses that in his letter where he writes: **James 4:3 (NIV)** *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

The ultimate goal in claiming God's promises is for God's glory to be shown through your life and for His will to be accomplished in and through your life.

Psalms 37:4 (NIV) *Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

This is a powerful verse. Some come to this promise by God and believe that if I just go to church semi-regularly and sing the songs then God is obligated to give me what I really want in life. But it goes much deeper than that. I believe that what the promise is really saying, is that as we find ourselves focusing on God and doing more than just singing praises to God but actually finding our highest pleasure in God, then as we do that, God will begin to transform the desires of our hearts until they come into alignment with His. And as that happens, then we will find that God absolutely will fulfill the deepest desires of your heart because those deepest desires are for God's will to be accomplished in and through my life so that He might be lifted up for all to see.

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When we jump back to that key passage about God's promises in 2 Peter 1:3-4, if you read on you'll discover that for those who are committed to claiming God's promises for the purpose of becoming more like Jesus, then it makes perfect sense what comes next.

2 Peter 1:5-8 (NIV) *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Now, the reality is, you don't acquire these qualities in your life from a self-improvement program. They are really a description of the character of God, which means that they are developed within you as you draw increasingly closer to God. He does the work within you as you set your mind and heart on becoming more and more like Jesus. So a proper response would be claiming God's promise to develop His very own character inside of you and ask God to continue set your heart on His glory and will. Ask Him to continually draw you closer to Him and to create an insatiable hunger for His glory to shine brightly in and through you. And as that becomes increasingly your greatest hunger and thirst then you'll discover His purposes and promises being fulfilled in and through your life.

With that background, I want to close out the sermon by quickly looking at just a few of the many amazing promises that God has offered to us to claim.

Promises of God:

- **Salvation:** John 3:16
- **Answered prayer:** John 15:7-8 (conditional upon remaining in Jesus and His word remain in us)
- **God has plans for your life:** Romans 8:28-29; Jer. 29:11 (it involves becoming more like Jesus)
- **Ongoing forgiveness:** 1 John 1:9 (conditional we need to confess our sins)
- **God's continual presence:** Hebrews 13:5; Mt 28:20
- **God's presence in the midst of difficulties:** Isaiah 43:2
- **God's strength when yours is weak:** Isaiah 40:29; 41:10
- **God's peace:** Philippians 4:6-7
- **Help with temptation:** 1 Corinthians 10:13
- **God's Wisdom:** James 1:5
- **Physical Healing:** Psalm 103:2-5
- **God's rest:** Matthew 11:28-30 Conditional, taking Jesus' yoke (his teachings) upon you
- **God's eternal plans for you:** John 14:1-3 – Good news for Betty Lincoln

I've been accumulating your own special promises from God you cling to and depend upon. Please let me know what those are and I'll add them to the list and plan on having it available next Sunday. Thank you to those who have already sent them to me.

Dwight L. Moody early on in his powerful ministry had discovered in studying the book of Acts that prayer was an essential part of the success of the early church. So he organized a church wide prayer meeting. The first meeting had a rather meager attendance but at this meeting he encountered an elderly Methodist man. This is how Moody described what happened next. "When he prayed I detected something new. I had never encountered praying like that before. There was power in that prayer unlike anything I'd ever encountered before. When I prayed God was "way out there", listening in the distance somewhere. But when this man prayed it was as if heaven came ever closer to earth.

Eager to learn his secret I went to see him one day. His name was Ambrose Whaley and everyone called him "Uncle Am". He was a retired blacksmith and a lay Methodist preacher. I soon came to the point when I asked him if I could pray with him. At once he arose, led me outside across the driveway into a red barn, up a ladder into a haystack. There, in some old hay, lay two big Bibles - one open. "What is this?" I thought. We went into a time of prayer and I poured out my heart, needs, burdens, wishes, aspirations, ambitions to God. Then he prayed - and there was "that difference" again. There, in that hay, on our knees, at eye level, I said "Uncle Am, what is it? You have some kind of secret in praying. Would you mind sharing it with me?" I was 24 at the time and he was 73, and with a eagle-look in his eyes, he said: "Young man, learn to plead the promises of God." That did it! My praying has never been the same since. That word completely changed my understanding of prayer. It really revolutionized it! I "saw it" as soon as he said it. Saw what? Well - when I prayed there was fervency, ambition, etc. But up until this time I had lacked faith. Prayer is the key to Heaven, but faith unlocks the door. There must be faith. Where does that come from? From hearing the Word of God. Uncle Am would plead Scripture after Scripture, reminding Him of promise after promise, pleading these like a lawyer does his case - the Holy Spirit pouring in His assurance of being heard. This man had memorized promise after promise of God. He prayed using the Bible as a basis on which his prayers were built.

Living in Awe of God's Promises Sermon Outline

Understanding God's Promises:

1. Some of God's promises are _____
2. Some of God's promises are _____
3. Some of God's promises are _____ to certain people and others are _____ in scope.

Key Verses about God's Promises:

2 Peter 1:3-4 What's the goal of God's promises?

What changes would that require in your life?

Promises of God:

- _____: John 3:16
- _____: John 15:7-8
- God has _____ for your life: Romans 8:28-29; Jer. 29:11
- Ongoing _____: 1 John 1:9
- God's continual _____: Hebrews 13:5; Mt 28:20
- God's presence in the midst of _____: Isaiah 43:2
- God's _____ when yours is weak: Isaiah 40:29; 41:10
- God's _____ Philippians 4:6-7
- Help with _____ 1 Corinthians 10:13
- God's _____: James 1:5
- _____ Psalm 103:2-5
- God's _____ Matthew 11:28-30
- God's _____ for you: John 14:1-3

Living in Awe of God's Promises Sermon Outline

Understanding God's Promises:

4. Some of God's promises are _____
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