

START: We are in a series called THE STORY

We are going through the Bible in a year and last week we started at the very beginning in Genesis

We learned how the man and the woman, created by God, started out in perfect unity with God in a garden, until they chose against God, disobeyed him and ate of fruit they should not have eaten of...

I want to pause for a minute at the ADAM AND EVE text and I want you to note their response to God after they had sinned. Count how many pronouns – how many “I’s” that refer to ADAM and EVE– there are in the response to God. This is important for how the Abraham story that we will be talking about today begins.

Here is the Adam and Eve response to God’s question to them...”What are you?” after they had sinned in the Garden

Adam answered (the Lord), “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹² The man said, “The woman you put here with me— she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

How many I's in this text? 6 right?

Now after this, Adam and Eve get banished from the garden, they have kids, the earth gets evil and there's a flood to start over again where only Noah and his wife are saved.

Enter Abram – soon to be called Abraham. That “ah” that is added to the name Abram means not only that Abram was to be the father of many nations but it also means that “God is with” him. We talked last time about the fact that we have an “I want to be with you” God.

And this is one of the most powerful themes of The Story.

Now with that text from the Adam and Eve still in your mind, note how this whole part of scripture that tells us the story of Abraham begins.

Note how it begins with blessing and promise. Count the pronoun “I” that refers to God...Here it is...

God tells Abraham to leave his country and go the land that God tells him to go to. Here is the opening text to the Abraham account from Genesis 12.

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

**²“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.^[a]**

**³I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;**

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you.”^[b]

How many I pronouns here? 6

What is God doing? Biblical scholars tells us that God is replacing our sinfulness with his faithfulness. He is replacing our tendency to choose against him with his promise that he will never fail us.

He is replacing us with himself.

He is saying...yes you messed up in the garden but guess what...this is not about you...this is about me...God.

This story will not work out if this is going to be all about your badness, your mistakes, your mess-ups

Rather, this story will only work out if its about my goodness, my promises, my glory cause that's whats going to bring this story to a wonderful end

GOD TELLS US – its not about you

Actually its all about ME...Your GOD...and the fact that I do not mess it up

I do not break my promises

I do not do things that are destructive

I do not use my power to oppress

Rather, when you are in MY STORY

When you are obedient to me
You will find out that my promises to you are 100%
trustworthy...

This is a story about who I am, and my great love for
you!

My unconditional commitment unwavering desire to be
with you, to walk with you, to bless you

And if you trust me, if you have faith in me, I will come
through

Not some of the time

Not most of the time

But all of the time

Just like the rainbow in the sky told Noah – I am a God
of promise and I always, always keep my promises

Guess how many promises are in the Bible?

Anyone venture a guess?

Someone counted once and came up with the fact that
there were **3,753** promises in the Bible that God makes
to his people to encourage them and lift them up in
this dark world.

Promises like: **“I will never leave you or forsake you”**
Jesus said that

**“Give and it shall be given unto you,
pressed down, shaken together and running over.”**

**“Nothing shall separate us from the love
of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

When you get discouraged, read the promises of God. They are all in here. And if you believe with Abraham that God always keeps his promises you have nothing to fear and a whole lot to be glad about today.

Many have called this call of God on Abrams life a covenant (or an agreement) of promise. Its an unconditional kind of covenant because it is based on who God is, not thank goodness, on who we are – or on who Abraham was.

Why is this so important?

Because God’s people – the kingdom he was building at the start of the STORY was not based originally on race (the Jews)

It was not based on people keeping a set of laws either

We often think this is what God had in mind in terms of the chosen people because we think of Jews and the ten commandments

But all that comes later as God is trying to help Moses out leading people that are just so difficult

Originally, before that came to be...

Where is God's heart here?

God is saying the people who will build my kingdom

The people who I will call my own

Are all people who trust me, and have faith in me like Abraham

They are the people who know that I will keep my promises, and they act like it, and they live it

The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you...and Abram went.

1. Gods chosen people – his kingdom builders -are people who have faith and live it out.

I was listening to the head of the seminary I am teaching at speak last Wednesday and he was sharing his story. It is an Assemblies of God affiliated seminary so people were really rocking when he was telling the story. You know, he would say something and people would say AMEN, and YOU KNOW IT. If he got off track people would say HELP HIM JESUS, C'MON NOW. Quite an experience listening to it all – quite an animated time

But this guy came out to Oakland from the deep south to start this little seminary for urban mission because God called him to do it.

He didn't know where he was going. He didn't have enough money to live out here. He needed 1,000 more per month for his salary – he was working odd jobs at the time – in order just to survive.

And he came out on faith, in response to what he believed was God's call, and he trusted God in it all.

He didn't tell anybody his needs but after about a week of being out here someone at a prayer meeting he was at came up to him and told him that he was going to give him 1,000 a month because in prayer he had just gotten the message that he was supposed to do that. And the whole experience was God providing for him,

step by step, moment by moment...and that little seminary exists today because he trusted God – he had faith and he moved forward on that faith.

That's how the kingdom is built. Those kind of people are kingdom builders. Abraham was a kingdom builder – the father of many nations.

Sometimes God asks us to do things that aren't always easy.

Sometimes they don't seem to make any sense.

Abraham is asked to leave his country, his land, his extended family, his connectional network and go to that land **that I GOD** will show you

That little phrase Abraham went....says it all,doesn't it?

He went. He went because he trusted God more than his own head.

ALL CHURCH RETREAT is next weekend and one of the things that we can do there is hang out. We don't have to rush here and there. We can just be together as a church family. And one of the things we always bring are puzzles. The best puzzler–putter–together person is Teresa Shaffer. I kid you not she can sit and figure

out those little cardboard shapes better than anyone I know.

You see I am not good at puzzles because I am not patient enough. I want to see the picture NOW. And sometimes I distrust the manufacturer of that puzzle – that whoever made it actually put all the necessary pieces in the box. What if they don't all fit together nicely? What if there is not really a picture or the piece in the middle is missing? That's why I don't do puzzles. I do not trust them. Teresa does...she trusts them and she is wonderful at it...

If you read Abrahams life though it is all about trust – trusting God. And you can see God continually putting Abraham in situations where he doesn't see the whole picture and has to go for it anyway.

He calls Abraham to go to a strange country – Abraham went

He calls Abraham to go to a strange country when Abraham is 75 years old

Abraham is arthritic, and maybe forgetful and maybe on a prune juice regimen – we don't know

Maybe he's got cataracts, and dentures...whatever he has

75 is not usually a time when you start on a new career or long journey

And It certainly isn't the time to start having kids, right?

God tells Abraham that he and Sarah are to have a child, and that child will have descendants as many as the sands of the seashore.

Do you know how long they have to wait for that child to be born?

Sarah is 105 years old when she has her first born son Isaac.

2. God often chooses the less qualified to be his kingdom builders because his strength shines through their weakness.

Know this...and be encouraged that

Abraham and Sarah both doubted Gods promise to give them a son

You will talk more about this in adult education

They doubted the promise because they were too old

And there is a place in scripture where they laugh a cynical laugh at God's promise to give them a son

We get cynical when we have been disappointed a lot

And they think they have been dissapointed

And then the child is born

Here we are again with God being faithful to us despite us

The child Isaac is born – despite their cynicism – and the child’s name Isaac means laughter

Isaac means laughter (screens)

Can’t you just see them? Two wrinkled faces bursting into a smile and then a raspy chuckle as they called out to their three year old....

Come to dinner laughter!

Let’s play peekaboo, laughter!

Time for bed, laughter!

Every time they said that name...laughter...they called and identified the promise of God....that had actually been fulfilled...**despite their doubt....**

So they call the child’s name...and it convicts them of their former doubt

At the same time they call the child’s name and it brings them not cynical laughter but real laughter – it brings them such joy – because they are calling the name of the child God promised them – his promise fulfilled.

The cynicism had now been transformed to joyful laughter because of God's faithfulness to them....

By the time Abraham is asked to sacrifice Isaac on the altar when Isaac is about 12 years old (which many of the pagan religions of the time did regularly) – the Jews never did this

Abraham has learned how this God of his works

By this time Abraham knows that

When it seems impossible, God makes a way

When there is no way for a solution, God makes a solution

When the way is so dark we are about to despair, God brings in hope and a way out

When cynicism sets in because of our own doubt and impatience in waiting

And sometimes we have to wait to see God's promise accomplished

God still comes through; When God makes a promise it stands and it is accomplished. It is not like when the world makes promises.

What promises do you worry about that might give way today? Not hold firm?

The promises you made when you were married? The promised confidence of a friend? The promised job promotion? The promised money for retirement...or to care for an aging parent? The promised surgery that will make you as good as new?

Most of you have lived long enough to know that what is promised by the world doesn't always hold firm.

What people say is very often not what people do.

And what I want to say to you today is this.... the world may disappoint you, and lie to you, and give you a bunch of hype with no substance....

But God's promises to you...that are all through scripture are different than what the world promises you...

Because....God never lies....his promises are always true...he always will always come through...maybe not in our timing....and at sometimes it doesn't happen this side of eternity....and it may seem that we are waiting far too long....**BUT GOD IS NEVER LATE...**

By the time Abraham takes Isaac to sacrifice him on MT MORIAH he knows this

And he doesn't just know it here (in his head); He knows it in his heart – that God is faithful
He is able to do this extremely difficult thing, because his faith has been strengthened through the years of learning to trust this wonderful God to come through even when it seemed impossible...

It says in scripture that **Abraham knew that God could even raise the dead**; so if Abraham did slay Isaac, and Isaac died, God would still keep his promise that his descendants would be like the sand on the shore through Isaac

And I'm sure Abraham is in agony as he's walking to the mountain with his son, but he's also thinking, "How's God going to rescue the situation this time?"

And Isaac says, "Dad...we've got the wood. We've got the fire. Where's the lamb for the burnt offering."

And the way the Hebrew reads is a direct prophecy to Jesus.

Abraham responds, "**The Lord will provide himself for a burnt offering my son.**"

It is a way to talk for emphasis, but it is also a prophetic utterance.

In the end God calls out to Abraham “Don’t lay a hand on – your son, your only son – God calls out just as Abraham is about ready to slay his boy.

And a ram caught in a thorn bush is sacrificed instead. When it was time, God would offer Jesus – his only son to be sacrificed for our sins.

But on that day he held back the hand of Abraham and he spared Isaac, Abrahams only son.

Isaac was the father of Jacob and Esau (twins)
Jacob (also called Israel – “one who wrestles with God”) was the father of Joseph and eleven other brothers
These twelve brothers were the beginning of the twelve tribes of Israel

**3. The Story is about God’s goodness, not ours.
Gods faithfulness, not ours. God always making a way where there seems to be no way and calling us to trust him.**

I told you before that during this series on THE STORY I would try to end my talk with you as often as I could with a story from our congregation.

Many of you know Katie Ferris. She worships with us during the summer when she is here working from college. She is senior at Whitworth University right now with my son Chris and may become my daughter in law...not sure.

If there ever was a story about God making a way where there seemed to be no way – of keeping his promises – of it being about him and his grace...not us and our goodness...of him giving us a purpose and assuring us that there is a plan...its this story.

KATIE STORY VIDEO AT THE END