

“The settlement of the Czechoslovak problem which has now been achieved is, in my view, only the prelude to a larger settlement in which all Europe may find peace. This morning I had another talk with the German Chancellor, Herr Hitler, and here is a paper which bears his name upon it as well as mine...We regard the agreement signed last night and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement as symbolic of the desire of our two peoples never to go to war with one another again.”

This was read on September 30, 1938, by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain shortly after his arrival from his trip to Germany. He would later stand outside of 10 Downing Street, the famous residence of the British Prime Minister, read the agreement again and would add, “I believe it is peace for our time...We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Now I recommend you go home and sleep quietly in your beds.”

This Agreement was meant to stop the advance of Nazi Germany after it had taken over Czechoslovakia. Yet less than a year later, Nazi Germany would invade Poland and thus began WW2. What was once seen as a hopeful promise and lasting peace to prevent another World War for the continent of Europe, would soon become a deceitful handshake and smile.

Humanity has a trust problem, which shouldn't come as a surprise. We learn early on in childhood that a promise isn't truly a promise unless it's done with a pinkie. Yet we also learn the hidden trick of crossing your other fingers or toes.

We learn phrases like, ‘keep your friends close and your enemies closer.’ We know that where humans are involved, so is sin; and if sin is involved, then promises always have a shelf life.

Moses, writing to the people of Israel, as they are on the precipice of entering the Promised Land, knows this. His people have been wandering in the wilderness for almost 40 years because they doubted God's promises.

Moses is showing his people once again, and us this morning, that the promises made by God do not have a shelf life because they are not grounded in something perishable like humans, but instead, in what is imperishable. Or more accurately, in who is imperishable.

You see, as Moses writes to his people, God's people, and he records for them the history of his people, he is reminding them who their promises came from. The same God we will see in Genesis 18, is the same God who brought his people out of bondage in the land of Egypt, and he is the same God that we are worshipping this morning.

And this God's promises do not expire, for they are Promises Kept. And this will be the title of the sermon this morning, Promises Kept.

Our main point today is this: **Our God keeps his promises.** Moses is going to show us 3 promises inside that truth. First, we will see the **Unbelief and the Promise of Seed.** Next, we will see the **Judgement and the Promise of Blessing.** Finally, we will see the **Jesus and the Promise of Mercy.**

Let's begin with the first point and promise: Unbelief and the Promise of Seed.

Last week, we looked at chapter 17 and how God instituted the covenant of circumcision with Abram and how he had changed Abram and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah. Sometime after the circumcision of Abraham and all of the men in his family, 3 men approach Abraham as he sat at the door of his tent.

In verses 2-3, Moses writes, **"When he [Abraham] saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth and said, 'O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant.'"**

There are things here that are clear and unclear. What's clear is that Abraham knew he was in the presence of the Lord. What's unclear is exactly how Abraham knew he was in the presence of the Lord. Could it have been that they were traveling on foot with no animals in the heat of the day? Or that three men suddenly appeared standing in front of him?

While this remains unclear, what is clear is that he was in the presence of the Lord, and would leave no stone of hospitality unturned for his visitors.

He brings water for their feet, a place to rest in the shade, and then verse 5 tells us that Abraham will bring them a morsel of bread. This morsel of bread would equate to 3 seahs of fine flour, which is equivalent to several gallons of flour, to be kneaded into cakes, a young calf, curds and milk. This is the biggest morsel of bread ever given to anybody, but it shows Abraham's humbleness and hospitality towards these visitors and the Lord.

This act of radical hospitality is then contrasted with this radical act of unbelief by Sarah that we read of in **verses 9-15.**

If you hear familiar themes in these verses from earlier chapters in Genesis, you wouldn't be wrong. First the Lord asks where Sarah is, which hints at Genesis 3 as the Lord asks Adam and Eve where they are, and then again in Genesis 4 as God asks Cain where his brother Abel is. Just as the Lord knew exactly where Adam, Eve, and Abel were, the Lord knew where Sarah was.

Yet he asks the question not for Abraham's sake, but for Sarah's sake. Culturally, the men and women would've eaten separately in the tent, as they still do in many Middle Eastern cultures. But the Lord wanted Sarah to hear everything he was about to tell Abraham.

In the past, when the Lord spoke to Abraham, Sarah is not mentioned. Yet it's clear up to this point in Genesis that Abraham has shared with Sarah what the Lord has said to him.

But in this passage, the Lord wants to make his promise explicitly clear to Sarah. He tells them in **verse 10, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.”** This is now the 4th time that the seed has been promised. He promised Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 17, and then again in this passage. Yet there are two distinctions in this passage that are different from the rest.

First, the specific promise, that Sarah would have a son by this time next year, is given to directly to the one who would bear this son. She no longer had to guess if Abraham was telling the truth or not; this promise was to her.

Second, what should’ve been a celebration of joy, quickly changes. Moses tells us in the following verses that Sarah listens to this promise, laughs to herself and questions if she should have pleasure now that she is old. The Lord then rebukes Sarah for her thoughts and then says to Abraham in verses 13-14, **“Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too hard for the Lord?**

Last week we saw Abraham fall on his face and laugh after he was reminded of the promise, yet the Lord did not rebuke him. So why does the Lord rebuke Sarah here? This is where we let Scripture interpret Scripture.

Luke, in his gospel, records two people receiving very similar announcements. First, Zechariah, the priest and future father of John the Baptist, is told that his barren wife Elizabeth will give birth to a son in their old age. Instead of believing God, he has an eerily similar response to Sarah, as he says, **“How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”**

Zechariah’s posture towards God was one of unbelief and asking God to prove it. He asks for a sign, and the Lord gives him one as he makes Zechariah mute until the birth of his son, John the Baptist.

The next person that’s recorded by Luke of receiving a similar announcement is Mary. The same kind of birth announcement is given to her, yet she answers, **“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”**

The difference might seem subtle at first, but they come from two different heart postures. Sarah, in our passage, and Zechariah know exactly how babies are made, yet they question whether or not God, who has displayed his wondrous acts, and is the creator of heaven and earth and our bodies, can make a barren womb alive.

Mary, similarly, knew how babies were made, believed the angel that she would conceive and carry the Messiah, but had no precedent for a virgin birth. You see, Sarah and Zechariah displayed unbelief. Mary displayed a humble posture of questioning of how a baby could be made apart from a sexual union, not whether or not God could do it or not.

A couple weeks ago, Tyler helpfully taught on what faithful doubting looks like. This is the notion that we can be faithful in believing that God will do something, but doubt our circumstances around us on exactly how and when he will do it. This is what Mary displayed: faithful doubting. Yet in our passage this morning, Sarah displays straight up unbelief and a refusal to take God at his word.

But before we cast judgments on Sarah, it is always wise to not place ourselves in the place of those in the Bible we hope we would be. For if we are truly honest with ourselves, we are most often Sarah, not Abraham, and we were all Sarah before the Lord chose to save us.

This passage exposes at least 3 forms of unbelief. First, Sarah was listening behind the tent door, hiding her face from God. Yet God saw and heard her. Some of you in here have been coming for weeks, months, or years. You come each week, hoping to be close to God, but not too close. You hide your face, you hide your heart, and you try to hide your unbelief towards God. If that's you this morning, this passage shows us that you can't hide from the Lord. For he is the one who sees, and the one who hears. You cannot hide from him no matter how hard you try.

Second, there are some of you in here that are waiting for God to give you a sign to show you that he's real, and that he is true. You sit here week after week in unbelief because God hasn't given you a sign, or performed a miracle in your life, or audibly spoken to you. You think that you'll believe once he's shown you what you want to see.

Third, there are some of you in here today that disbelieve that God could ever look upon you with loving eyes. Those around you can't see your past. They can't see what you've done. They can't see what you've thought. God could never forgive me. My sin is too grievous for him to forgive.

If any of these 'unbeliefs' are you this morning, first, I'm grateful that you are here. Second, God's word has something for you this morning. It has something for all of us this morning. We as believers, would be naïve to say that we escape the sin of unbelief. For we all veer into it at different times and in different ways. But as wide as a net as this passage casts, the promise of the gospel is wider still.

Which leads us to our second point and promise this morning, **Judgment and the Promise of Blessing.**

After the tent scene, Abraham leads the three men from the tent to a place they could look down towards Sodom, and as they stand there, Moses records an interesting interaction between Abraham and the Lord. Let's read **verses 16-19.**

What's recorded for us is a conversation between Abraham and the Lord that is unique in many ways. First, Abraham, in relation to all the other Old Testament figures is unique, in terms of his relationship with God. 2 Chronicles 20 calls Abraham, God's friend. No one else is given this explicit title.

In addition to being the only one called the friend of God, Abraham is also the only OT figure that shares a meal with God before the incarnation of Jesus.

With those distinctions in mind, it becomes easier to make sense of this interaction between God and Abraham. God shares his thoughts with this man, to include his reaffirmation of his promise to bless him, and God also shares with him why judgment is coming upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

So why would God do this? What's the purpose of telling him these two things that seem to be at odds with one another. How does blessing and judgement go together?

If we think back to Genesis 3, God promises that there will be a war between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. In Genesis 12, we see that this promise will now run through Abram, he is the chosen seed to carry on this promise, and God promises to keep that line going through a promised son, the soon to be Isaac.

This people and nation would also, as we read last week in Genesis 17, walk before God and be blameless, or as God says in our passage this week, that the seed would keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. How would Abraham do this? How would he keep his children and his household from straying from the way of the Lord? The Lord answers one way he will do this in **verses 20-21**.

In Genesis 12, God promises to bless Abraham and his seed and he promises to curse the seed of the serpent. We are seeing this played out in our passage today. The seed of Abraham is being blessed, and the seed of the serpent is about to be cursed. And one way the Lord will keep Abraham and his household on the narrow path and bless him is by showing the judgment due to those that sin against the Lord and reject him.

Sodom and Gomorah will be an example to future generations of not only God's judgment, but Moses is also showing us that when the Lord brings justice and punishment, that his justice and punishment is fair and right. He would not just destroy Sodom due to hearsay. Verse 21 tells us that he will go down and see their wickedness firsthand.

In addition, God makes it clear that that he has chosen Abraham to command his children and his household to keep the way of the Lord. God expected Abraham to pass along not only what God did in his sight, but also the character of God.

The OT always seems like a bad game of telephone. Everyone is probably familiar with this game. One person starts with a really easy sentence, they tell the person next to them and then it goes around in a circle. The game ends when it finally gets back to the original person and they see how close or very far this sentence changed. The usual outcome of this game is disastrous.

A phrase like: 'Arthur the bunny was eating carrots in the garden,' turns into: 'Arthur the cat was eating catnip in the garage.'

Unfortunately, the OT shows this same kind of breakdown in communication. You see the issue is not with the original message; that never changed. The issue is seen as it gets passed down from generation to generation, or not at all.

For example, you start with all that Adam and Eve saw and heard from the Lord, and shortly after you have Noah and the flood because of the wickedness on earth. Then you have the worldwide flood and the reset with Noah. God reasserts his covenant with Noah and blesses him, yet a short time later, you have the rebellion of the Tower of Babel. Therefore, God scatters the peoples of the world and gives them different languages as a judgment for their rebellion, and now we are here, today, with Sodom and Gomorah. Their sin is so great that the suffering and wickedness is literally crying to the heavens.

Parents were to pass on to children what they saw and heard. They were to pass on the character of our God. Yet it only takes one generation to forget what God is like and what he has done. But this is why the Word of God is so important, for the Word of God records real events, real people, and our unchanging God.

This is why we must know it, actually know it. These Scriptures are not just for pastors and theologians; this is for you. Men this is for you, and not just for you to keep it to yourself, but to pass on and to teach.

I want to take a second and speak directly to the men in the room: fathers, husbands, engaged men, single men. God says in this passage that he chose Abraham so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to him to Abraham his blessing.

In other words, the condition by which Abraham would receive the blessing was by Abraham raising up his children and his household in the way of the Lord. Now I want to be clear that that promise and that condition was specifically for Abraham and his children after him, and if you read through the Scriptures long enough, you see how Abraham and his household do not obey and keep the way of the Lord. But there is an underlying truth here that we as men cannot simply skip over.

The world gives us men and images all the time about what we are to look like, act like, and aspire to be. Tom Brady tells us that the greatest thing he can give his kids is not his presence, but to show them a dad that prioritizes his profession and being really good at your job. In other words, the best thing he could do for his family was to accomplish his goals, even if it came with the cost of a divorce and not seeing his children.

Or what about the subtle current in the background that says to single and married men that the greatest thing you can give your family is financial success? Figure out how you can make the most money possible so that you can provide your family or future family with financial security, a nice house, a big car, extravagant vacations, and everything your kids could ever ask for?

I am not saying that as men we shouldn't be excellent in what we do. I am not saying that it is bad to financially support yourself and your family. But have we examined the Scriptures, God's Word to us, for what our priorities as fathers, husbands, and men should look like?

Our passage today says that we are to raise our children and our households in the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. But how are we to do this when we aren't pursuing righteousness and justice ourselves first?

Men, are we leading our families in such a way that looks different than the world? That places our family's pursuit of the Lord above all else? Because if we are not doing it ourselves, how could we ever expect our families to follow us? Oh men, I pray now that you would examine your lives, examine your hearts. Do those around you see a man that lives at the foot of the cross, or do they see a man that loves himself and this world?

If you're listening to this right now and you have no idea how to start or what that looks like, please come talk to me, find an elder or a man in our congregation you see doing this well. And most importantly run to Jesus. Run to the cross, and cast yourself upon him.

This leads us to the third and final point and promise this morning **Jesus and the Promise of Mercy**.

The men begin to head down toward Sodom, and Moses finally makes clear what was unclear in the beginning. Abraham stands before the Lord, and the two other men head down toward Sodom. Genesis 19 will reveal that these two other men are actually two angels.

What takes place next is one of the great intercessory conversations with God in the Bible. An intercession is when someone speaks on behalf of someone else. So in this conversation Abraham stands before the Lord and pleads for mercy for Sodom and Gomorah.

Abraham asks the Lord if he will destroy the righteous people in the city with the unrighteous. Will he not spare all the unrighteous for the few that are? He then asks if the Lord would spare the city if there were at least 50 righteous. He appeals to who God is and his character and asks, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

The Lord responds to Abraham and says that he will spare the city if 50 righteous are found. He then acknowledges further that he, Abraham, is but dust and ashes compared to God himself, but he feels compelled to ask for more. He begs for 45, for 40, for 30, for 20, and finally for 10 righteous. The Lord answers in verse 32, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it."

Abraham asks for no more. Why Abraham chooses to stop at 10 is unclear, but Moses does make several things clear to the Israelites then, and us now, from this intercession.

First, Abraham is relentless in his pleading. I think we can often view speaking to God like we do when our kids beg for something. Parents know that nothing deters a child from asking their

parents as many times as they can when they really really really want something. Is this how we view prayer with God?

Do we transfer how our sinful hearts feel and respond to God and how he has shown himself to be and act? Do we think that God looks at us and says, “man what a whiny person?” This is not how we ought to view God. This is called taking a man-centered approach to God’s Word and how we view God. We take how we feel, how our relationships function, and transfer that to how God must view and feel about us.

But the correct way to view God and his posture towards us is from a God-centered view. We let God’s Word inform us of how he views us.

So to take this God-centered approach, in our passage, we can look to the gospel of Luke, when Jesus himself gives us the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18 that kept coming to the unrighteous judge in her city. She kept coming to him over and over again begging for justice. Jesus then tells us that if the unrighteous judge will give this widow justice, how much more will God give justice to his elect. Jesus tells us that this parable is given to us “to the effect that [we] ought always pray and not lose heart.” In other words, God wants the relationship. He wants you to pray to him. He wants you to ask him for things.

I think we can read our passage this morning in chapter 18 at the beginning of each year, when we read through Genesis in our Bible reading plans and subtly think ‘Man, Abraham sure knows how to grovel.’ But I want all of us to stop and think about what Abraham is doing here. He is begging and wrestling with God for the souls of these cities.

I pray that this convicts your heart as it has mine. Have you ever prayed this way? Have you ever pleaded and wrestled with God for the eternal souls of others?

Do we pray for our unconverted children, family, friends, and coworkers this way? Do we plead with God for his mercy upon the people we love the most?

Do we pray that people trapped in darkness all over the world would come to a saving knowledge of the Lord through Jesus? Brothers and sisters, do we pray this way? Or do we functionally live as those that believe prayer changes nothing?

Moses not only shows us what it looks like to pray for the eternal souls of others, but also dives deeper into the character of God. Abraham asks, “shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

If someone asked you to define a judge, how would you do it? Depending on our life circumstances, we can subtly bring in our own definitions of what a judge is. Some might find a judge fair, where others might find a judge vindictive and biased. But this is why it is so important to let the Bible define things for us, not our feelings. When we look at the Scriptures, we see that a judge is someone who has the authority to settle disputes and restore justice.

So what kind of justice are we referring to when it comes to God and this passage? When it comes to biblical language, justice can be defined as fairly giving someone what they are due, especially when it comes to the law. Therefore, Sodom and Gomorah were about to be judged for their transgressions against each other and the Lord. Justice was coming, and verse 21 tells us that God would go down to the city to verify this himself.

Some of us in this room might be tempted to think that this isn't fair, that the judgment of God and the way that he executes doesn't feel right. You might be tempted to ask, "even if there were less than 10 people, why would God not have mercy on them? Isn't God a God of love?" Or "why isn't there a warning for the people before the Lord judges them?"

First, if you remember, Sodom and Gomorah were already saved once, by God, through Abraham in chapter 14. After saving them, Abraham testified to the King of Sodom about the Lord, the God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth. The Lord spared them once, in his mercy, and they were given a chance to turn from their wicked ways, yet they continued. He has warned them already, and he has every right to exact justice on them.

Second, there is tendency for us to judge the judge. C.S. Lewis gives a great illustration of this in one of his essays when he says that we are 'eager to arraign God to appear in the dock of our courtroom rather than recognizing that we belong in the dock of his court.'

In other words, we exude this arrogance when we declare that we know what is just and what isn't. We become the judge and put God, the Judge of all the earth, in our courtroom. We begin to say things like, 'well if I was God, I wouldn't do that;' or 'if I was God, I wouldn't say that what they are doing is wrong;' Or 'If I was God, I wouldn't send people to hell, only the Hitlers of the would end up there.'

But this is when things begin to fall apart. You see, Abraham is affirming something that we often forget. HE is the Judge of all the earth, AND he will do what is just. The standard of justice is not our feelings, emotions, or hearts.

The standard of justice is God himself, and in that mirror, we all fall short, or as Paul says in Romans 2, **"Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice such things. Do you suppose, O man-you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself-that you will escape the judgement of God?"**

There is no denying the justice of God, but Moses is also trying to show us something else, the other side of the coin, that every opponent to God's view of righteousness and justice misses: the mercy of God.

Did you notice that this judgment is the opposite of the flood? When the flood of judgment came with Noah, the wicked were destroyed, but the righteous were saved.

However, this is not what Abraham asked for or what God shows us. Abraham knew that Lot was still in Sodom. If all he was concerned for was Lot and his family he would've asked for that, but that's not what he asked for. Instead, he asks for God to spare the many on account of the righteous few.

In other words, there is merciful act that is taking place. If there are only 10 righteous in the city, God would spare the wicked cities in his mercy.

The 10 righteous for the city of wickedness. This is scandalous. This doesn't seem right. Why would he do this? Why would God show this kind of mercy?

God was preparing us. God was pointing forward past this event. He was preparing us for what was to come through the seed of Abraham. You see, God would answer Abraham's pleas to spare the wicked on behalf of the righteous, but it wasn't in the way Abraham or any of us expected.

God was preparing us for the gospel, which is this: You, every single one of you who is sitting in this room is in God's courtroom, and Paul tells us in Romans 3 that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Therefore, we are all guilty, guilty in the sight of God. You've been given a life sentence for your sins. Before the judge tells the officers to take you away, the judge of all the earth, who can do nothing except that which is just, gets off his bench.

He takes off his robes and exchanges them for your prison clothes. He lets you go free and says that he will pay the penalty for your crimes that he will take the punishment for your sins. The holy and righteous one becomes your substitute. The holy and righteous one turns away the wrath of God due to you, because of your sins against him, and turns it on to himself. The holy and righteous one takes his robes and gives them to you, and now all the Father sees is his Son.

You see what Moses has been showing us in this passage is that Jesus is the fulfillment of this entire passage. He is the promised seed that would come and make all things right. He is the one that would ensure God's blessing to his people that would keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice for us. And he is the righteous one that would spare the wicked.

He is the answer to your unbelief. Jesus is the answer to your unbelief that keeps you dead in your sins, for Jesus is the one that breathes new life into our dead hearts!

Jesus is the answer to your unbelief that is waiting for God to make himself known to you and give you a sign! Jesus is the sign! You no longer have to wait!

Jesus is the answer to your unbelief that thinks you are unsavable and too dirty to love! Jesus is the one who knows everything about you, everything you've ever done or said, and says you are mine! There was nothing about us or in us that made God choose us. It's only because of his mercy! His beautiful, unexplainable, unending, unfathomable, never-ending mercy that led him to choose us.

Oh you who are far off, listen closely. Jesus has come. Jesus has lived. Jesus has died. Jesus has been raised. And King Jesus is now reigning. And that Judge King is coming back and James tells us that he is standing at the door. Would you not tarry and wait any longer? For the mercy of God has come to us, and his name is Jesus.

And this Jesus has promised that all those that come to him he will never cast out, and that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life. That is a promise that will never fail. That is a promise that is kept.