

PROMISES, THE POWER TO PREDICT THE FUTURE

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Promises are powerful.

When I was about 10 years of age I was left home alone one evening because I was sick and the rest of my family had to go to my grandparents home some five miles away in the town closest to our farm.

Like the storms that have been plaguing eastern Colorado these past many nights, so that night a storm hit our area.

It was one of those storms that is so close that the lightening and the thunder coincide.

When that thunder clapped it felt like the whole house shook.

I had seen such storms before and just that year I had seen some of the smaller buildings on our farm picked up in a tornado and smashed and strewn all over our yard and nearby fields.

That night as the storm raged I was in a second floor bedroom.

I was in bed and I had the covers pulled up over my head and I alternated between crying and singing.

I would sing loudly attempting to drown out the sound of the wind.

But every so often I would stop singing and listen to see if it was over - because it wasn't I would begin to cry in fear.

Then I would get hold of myself and whistle or sing again, trying to pretend I wasn't afraid and wasn't in danger.

At that point my future seemed very uncertain.

I tell you that story as a parable of life for all of us.

While not every day is the crisis that night was for me, life is uncertain.

Yes there are many good things in life and many good days but the future is unpredictable.

What will become of human beings?

Author James Gustafson wrote that nothing in nature assures us that nature is friendly to humans.

What makes us so sure that history and nature are tilted in favor of humans so we that we can expect to go on existing on this earth?

Dinosaurs didn't make it, what makes us think we will?

What evidence do we have to think humans will go on forever?

Is a nuclear holocaust or an ozone depleted natural disaster going to be the end of all of us?

What guarantee do we have that we have a future? Life is uncertain.

It not only appears uncertain for humanity as a whole but it is uncertain for each of us individually.

Friday evening a young couple in Denver were assaulted, he was killed. 30 years of age and gone.

Yesterday we buried a man of our church who had not reached 45 years of age. No hint of illness, every reason to expect to live for years.

Life is uncertain.

Oh, we can pull the covers up over our heads and sing or whistle trying to pretend the storm of uncertainty isn't blowing around us - but it is.

Is there any predictability in the midst of all this uncertainty?

How do we know that humanity isn't going to wind up on a cosmic garbage heap?
How do we know that we individually aren't just going to one day too suddenly be gone?

BECAUSE OF A PROMISE! Promises are powerful.

Last week I noted that there are two anxieties that are common to many people: Anxiety over the past and anxiety about the future.

Last week I spoke of the first: Our anxiety about the past.

Many of us would do most anything to change some of our past.

But only one thing can alter our histories: Forgiveness.

God by His grace changes our past when he forgives and forgets our sins - when he treats us as if we had never done them.

That forgiveness, we saw last week, is only possible because Jesus, God's Son, took the punishment for our past sins and failures.

By his death in our stead, we can be forgiven.

We also saw last week that not only can our history with God be changed but so can the histories of others with us be changed.

And their history with us is changed the same way - by forgiveness - our forgiveness of them.

Now this week I want us to think about the other anxiety common to most people - anxiety about the future.

Is there any predictability in life's sea of uncertainty?

Is there anything stable, anything on which we can count?

Yes, we have a promise - a promise that predicts our future.

Promises are powerful!

In my bed that night as the wind howled I heard our phone ring.

I don't remember if it rang during a fit of crying or a fantasy of singing but I heard it and as frightening as it was to venture from my bed I answered it.

The six words I heard first, changed my night.

They were a promise and they predicted my future.

It was my father on the phone and he said, "Jerry, I'm coming to get you."

The wind still blew, the thunder still cracked, it seemed like an eternity but the outcome in my mind was never in doubt - my father had said, he had promised - he was coming.

Because of a promise, My future was no longer unpredictable.

Promises are powerful!

Only one thing affirms that humanity will not simply expire.

Only one thing assures us that the entire universe will not simply blow apart.

Only one thing guarantees that you will not soon just cease to exist.

A promise!

Only one thing affirms that human history is under control.

Only one thing assures us that the universe and everyone in it is moving toward a very predictable future.

Only one thing guarantees that you will live forever.

A promise!

God has broken into human history and into our histories and has spoken.

To a man named Abraham he said, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

And then the promise: "And I will bless you."

Abraham believed the promise and it changed his life.
His uncertain future became certain as he embraced the promise.

That promise of God became the rudder by which Abraham guided his life.
That promise of God was the anchor of his soul as he waited 25 years for its fulfillment.

That promise of God was the solid foundation on which he stood when his world was shaken by the command of God to sacrifice his son Isaac.

That promise of God made Abraham's life predictable - IN spite of what would come on a day to day basis, Abraham knew the outcome was secured.

The promise changed his life by securing his future.
Promises are powerful.

To a man named Moses, God came and said, "lead my people out of Egypt".
Over one million powerless people are supposed to just up and walk out of the country with the most powerful army in the world.

And when Moses hesitated, God promised, "I will be with you."

Moses believed the promise and that promise made Moses' life predictable.
That promise freed Moses to act even in uncertain circumstances because he knew the outcome - His God was with him.

Now mind you, he didn't know where his next day's food would come from.
He didn't know what army would attack and when.
He didn't know if sickness would strike or how severely BUT his future was certain - Because of a promise.

Promises are powerful.

The author of the book of Hebrews writes, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son."

His Son, Jesus, said, "You trust the Father? Trust me as well. He who believes in me will live even though he dies."

Do you remember when Jesus spoke those words?

It was at the grave of Lazarus.

He spoke them to Martha who had buried her brother just three days earlier.

Was this promise reliable?
Would she truly see again this brother who have died in Christ?
Can you imagine how that promise changed her life?

It predicted an element of her future that was more important to her than all the rest of life.

In the past 10 days I've been involved in two funerals.
Whether that promise of the Lord is true or not makes all the difference in the world to the loved ones. It shapes their future.

Jesus said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

It's that promise that ordered the Apostle Paul's life.
It's that promise that settled the future for John and Peter, for Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Whitefield and Wesley.

Foolish is the person who faces the uncertain future without the promise of Jesus to predict it. "I will never leave you or forsake you"

I may not know every turn in the road but I know the destination.
I may not know what tomorrow may bring but I know who is there with me.
A promise predicts my future.

God has spoken - He speaks a promise and it secures our future.

Anything in this otherwise uncertain life can be handled when you know the ultimate outcome - when you believe God's promise.

But of course the promise is only as good as the person who makes it.

According to the Hebrews 6 text, read earlier, the promise made to us is as certain as God Himself. vs 10: "When God made his promise, since there was no one greater to swear by, he swore by himself."

God not only made the promise, he took an oath on his own name that what he promised would come true.

When someone wants to declare the reliability of what they are saying they swear by a name greater than their own.

Until recently in our own courts we recognized the value of such an oath.
We would ask people to tell the truth so help them God - or in other words as God is their witness, this is the truth.

But because God has no one greater than himself to swear by he took an oath on his own name.

As surely as God is, so will come to pass what he has promised.

The writer of Hebrews then says (vs 19), "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."

When the future is settled it changes the "now".
When you know the outcome it frees you in the present.

The promise of God frees us to experience life not fear it.
When our faith is anchored deeply into the promise of God, when our future is predicted and secure - then we can begin to truly live.

A number of years ago I took a group of high school students rock climbing in the Sangre de Cristo mountains.

A high school junior named Mona started up the rock wall but about 20 feet off the ground she became frightened, then she froze.
She couldn't move, she clung to the rock and cried.

Finally with great coaxing she tried again and fell.

She was tied in and fell only about 12 inches.
When she realized that even if she fell she wouldn't get hurt she climbed all over the face of that mountain.

The security of those ropes set her free.

If you have believed God's promise your future is settled, it is secure.
Jesus has promised he will never leave you.
He has promised that even if you die you will live.

That's why Paul could say with such boldness: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, not any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There are two ways to face the future:

One is to pull the blankets up over your head and whistle in the wind storm.

The other is to answer the phone - to hear the words of the Father.

Do you believe the promise of God?
His promise, believed, predicts your future.

You no longer need to flounder in the unpredictable waves of life.
Your future is secured by the promise of God.

Do you trust Him?

God comes with a promise, a promise that predicts your future, that secures it, that becomes an anchor for your soul, and sets you free - Will you believe Him?

It will change your life.

God's promises are powerful.

God by his grace offers us forgiveness to change our past and he offers us His promises to predict and settle our future.