

Galatians 3:15-22

*God Keeps His Promises*

In September of 1994, after six losing campaigns for parliament in Denmark, standup comedian Jacob Haugaard actually got elected. Among his campaign promises were good weather, better Christmas presents, guaranteed tail winds for all cyclists, more jellies in bags of candy mix, shorter lines at the supermarket, standard-size dust bags in vacuum cleaners, and Nutella (which is a Danish hazelnut spread) in the field rations of the Danish army.

All viable candidates get a certain amount of government money for their campaigns. Jacob spent his entire allotment on beer for the whole town of Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark.

Fortunately he only served one term. What I couldn't find was any recorded of his success rate in keeping his campaign promises.

In 1935 FDR signed the Social Security Act into law.

The Government of the United States put out an information bulletin to explain to workers to explain the details of the new Social Security law. It said:

"The taxes called for in this law will be paid both by your employer and by you. Beginning January 1, 1937 you will pay 1 cent for every dollar you earn, and at the same time your employer will pay 1 cent for every dollar you earn, up to \$3000 per year. Over the next 12 years the tax will be increased gradually until, beginning in 1949, you and your employer will each pay 3 cents on each dollar you earn up to \$3000 a year. That is the most you will ever pay."

Interestingly, during the 1940's congress postponed increases. The tax rate of 6% actually was delayed until 1960.

Isn't it interesting how time and circumstances can do so much to change the promises that we make? I'm sure there's not one of us here today who hasn't promised one thing but later done another

You can be as well intentioned as can be and end up having to change something you promised because of factors nobody counted on.

It happens to individuals. It happens to organizations. It happens to governments.

But, the one place it never happens is with God.

What God says, God means. What God promises, God makes happen.

Now, I can't stress enough, how vitally important that character quality of God is to us. And the reason is, because life has a way of bringing us all kinds of situations that leave us with nothing to stand on but God's promises.

For a believer, if we fail to trust God, we end up with all kinds of consequences: fear, worry, depression, frustration, irritability, hostility, and hopelessness.

The hallmark of a successful Christian life is faith. And faith is simply believing God. It's taking Him at His word and believing that His promises are true, no matter what things look like.

In Romans 8:28 He says, He'll cause all things to work together for good in our lives. What's our response? We need to believe Him.

In Matthew 28 He said, "I'll be with you always." Regardless of how alone we may feel at times, we need to trust Him.

In I John 1:9 God says, "I'll forgive every sin you confess to me, no matter what." Our response has to be to take Him at His word.

We could go on and on with promise after promise that God has made to us. The Bible is filled with promises -from the promise in Genesis 3:15 that God would send a Savior, to the promise in Revelation 22:20 where Jesus said He would come again.

The promises are there. But have you ever noticed this phenomenon? While your listening in church, or your reading the Bible on your own you say, "I see the promise. I just kinda claim that promise. I stand on that promise."

But then the problems just keep on coming, and you're so sure that things will never work out for good.

And what do we do? We begin to put God's promises in the same category as all the rest of the promises we've heard from people.

Today most gold is mined by big corporations using specialized equipment. But originally, prospectors panned for gold. They would swirl a mix of soil and water around the pan. Because Gold is very dense, with a little skill the pan could be swirled at just the right speed to allow the gold to settle to the bottom of the pan, while the dirt and the worthless stuff would wash over the side.

They'd keep doing this until there was nothing left but gravel - and hopefully a little speck of gold. They'd say the gold was "panned out"!

We tend to look at life and then look at God's promises and think they're just not "panning out. They're not working."

So we're left with this uncomfortable contradiction in our belief system. On the one hand we say, "I've trusted God with my eternal soul, but on the other we feel like we can't trust God with the real stuff that makes up our life right now.

Well here's the question; Can God be trusted? Does God keep His promises?

There's a lot of places in the Bible that we could go to answer that question and one of the most clear and obvious is our passage for today in Galatians chapter 3.

**Turn to Gal 3 vs 15 pg 1035**

Our study of Galatians has brought us to the mid point of the book.

The purpose of this letter from an apostle named Paul, is to clear up some false teaching that has infiltrated the congregations.

What we believe does matter and the letter to the Galatians is a good example of why it matters.

In the Galatians' case a group of Jewish men who claimed to believe in Jesus, had come down from Jerusalem and convinced the Galatian Christians that Jesus was certainly important. But Jesus alone wasn't enough.

They said, since God gave His commandments through Moses, the only way to be forgiven of sin was to both obey the commandments and believe in Jesus.

Their message was that eternal life had to come through the commandments. If you say a person is saved by faith alone, what do you do with the commands that say we're to obey God. You can't just ignore them!

So like people today who want to add some sort of works to the gospel of grace they said, "It's faith in Jesus plus doing."

What we've seen so far was the total inability of any of us to earn heaven. God is not a debtor to any man and if we could earn our way to heaven, He'd be in debt to us.

Instead, God paid the sin debt for us in Jesus Christ and offers heaven as a gift by His grace.

No one is forgiven of sin or gets to heaven because of what they do but by trusting what Christ has done.

So, the apostle Paul, upon hearing of this defection from the truth, writes this letter to the Galatians.

So far we've seen Paul's spiritual beginnings, how God turned him from blasphemer to missionary. Paul's called the Galatians to look at their own spiritual beginnings.

Paul has pointed to his apostolic authority and now he's dealing with the authority of the Scriptures themselves.

People say, "You can prove anything from the Bible."

Sometimes it seems like that, doesn't it? With all the different churches and denominations.

After all, the Judaizers used the Bible to prove their point to the Galatians.

But now watch what God shows us here through Paul's writing. You can't just prove anything from the Bible. There may be some less central issues that we can have varied opinions on, but not the basics.

If we read the Bible logically and carefully, we'll see that while there might be a real variety of different applications of Scripture to different needs and circumstances, there's only one correct interpretation of the essentials.

God hasn't contradicted Himself. God hasn't changed course mid-stream. Time can't cancel out the promises of God.

We're going to look at Galatians 3 in just a minute but before we do I'd like to lay out a little ground work. This will make the verses we're going to read today a whole lot easier to understand.

There's 2 areas of ground work to touch on.

First: *The History*

Paul's going to take us back about 4000 years to Abraham and then to Moses who came along several hundred years after Abraham.

God called Abraham out of a relatively advanced area located in the fertile crescent down to the untamed land of Canaan.

God promised Abraham that He would give him an innumerable 'seed' or posterity, that He would give that posterity a homeland, and that in him all families of the earth would be blessed.

God confirmed these same promises to Abraham's son Isaac and then to Isaac's son Jacob.

Jacob died outside the Promised Land, in Egypt, where he had fled to escape a famine.

Jacob's 12 sons died in exile too. Centuries passed. It looked like God's promises were empty. Then Moses was born. Through Moses God delivered the descendants of Abraham from slavery and gave them his commandments.

That's a thumbnail sketch of the history that links Moses with Abraham.

Now: *The Theology*

God dealt with Abraham and Moses two different ways.

To Abraham God gave the promise: I'll give you the land, a seed, and the blessing.

To Moses God gave the Law, summarized in the 10 commandments.

Think about the difference. To Abraham everything was in the realm of "promise," "grace," and "faith."

With Moses it was all in the realm of "law," "commandments," and "works."

The conclusion that Paul's leading to is that Christianity is a system of promise going back to Abraham, not a system of law, going back to Moses.

Christians are enjoying the promise God made to Abraham centuries ago.

Not that Moses has no place. After all, the same God gave the promise to Abraham and the law to Moses. If God the author of both the promise and the law then obviously there's a purpose for them both.

So what's the relationship? What about the law? Since the law came after the promise, did it cancel out the promise of grace that God originally made?

The first point I want us to see today is this: *Time Can't Cancel Out the Promises of God*

## **read vs 15**

*Covenant* is the word that's also translated "testament." We talk about a "last will and testament."

You might paraphrase this, "Guys, let me give you an every day illustration, here. When someone leaves a will, the things in it can't be changed."

At the reading of the will some people might be thrilled and others might be disappointed. A will might be contested but no one can alter or annul its terms as long as it's demonstrated that the person had complete control of his mental

faculties when he made it.

Now, if that's true of a human promise, how much more immutable and indestructible is a promise made by the eternal God.

What promise did God make? **Read vs 16**

Here's the Genesis passage Paul's referring to: Ge 22:18 *"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."*

Follow this now. God promised an inheritance to Abraham and his descendants. Paul knew perfectly well that the immediate literal reference of this promise was to Abraham's physical descendants, the Jewish people.

But he knew something else too. He knew that this didn't exhaust the meaning. There was something more to the world being blessed than just having the Jewish people in it.

The purpose of Abraham and his posterity wasn't an end in themselves. It was to bring forth a seed (singular) who is Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

That was God's promise. It was free and unconditional. There were no strings attached. There were no works to do, laws to keep, merit to establish, no conditions to fulfill. It was going to happen because God promised it would.

In fact, just to emphasize how totally unconditional this promise was look back with me at **Genesis 15 pg 13**

**Read vs 4-13, 17-18**

What's the point of all this? The Semitic way of making a covenant was to split an animal and separate the halves.

Then the two parties would walk between the parts. In fact, the word translated "made a covenant" in verse 18 is the Hebrew word *karath*, which means "to cut."

In this case, only God went between the cut animal because Abraham wasn't promising to do anything. Only God made the promise.

Like a person's will, a divine promise is unalterable. It's still in force today. God doesn't make promises so that He can break them later on.

God's definitely of sound mind, and He's never annulled or modified His will.

No amount of time. No series of events. No intervention by people, is ever going to change it.

**Now go back to Galatians.**

Here's the Law of God fits in... **Read vs. 17**

The commandments God gave to Moses don't change God's promises which were made hundreds of years before.

The promise had been in effect for 4 centuries so the law wasn't suddenly going to change everything.

Time Can't Cancel Out The Promises of God.

**Read 18**

An inheritance is a gift. It comes to the rightful heir. Israel wasn't always faithful to God. Sometimes they were so unfaithful that God allowed other nations to invade and dominate. But God still blessed the nations through His seed.

That's a promise based on grace, not law.

Now, sometime we read one of God's promises in the Bible and we get excited. We say, "That's for me."

Then we wait. And we wait. And we wait. Nothing seems to happen so we doubt. We doubt. And we doubt some more.

Let that happen a few times and instead of trusting God more, we take things into our own hands. "If God isn't going to keep His promises then I'm going run the show!"



Remember something that's absolutely crucial. God gives promises, not time tables. And what seems like forever to us is nothing to God.

I have a 5 year old grandson. Newly turned five. He loves miniature golf, bowling, ice skating, swimming in the ocean. He's in heaven when he's in Ocean City because not only is there miles of sandy beaches but there's a bazillion miniature golf courses!

If we're going to do something that Anthony loves, we make sure that we don't talk about it too far in advance. In fact, like 5 minutes before is really the best time.

Now why is that? Because a 5 year old has no concept of time.

If I say we're going to go bowling next week, which we are, he'd asked us, "Are we going yet?" about 197 times.

That's just like us. We don't begin to understand time as it really is. Time from God's vantage point.

So we get anxious and impatient. And we begin to think that somehow time has canceled out the promises of God.

Listen, God keeps His promises. Just don't try to force Him into the straightjacket of your little timetable!

Now at this point you can almost hear these false teachers saying something like this: "Hey Paul. It's like you're skipping right over Moses. What about the 10 commandments? What about the 600 some other laws spelled out in Leviticus and Deuteronomy?"

Remember this: Not only can time not cancel out God's promises but *sometimes the very things that look like contradictions to God's promises are His method of fulfilling His promises!*

**In vs 19 Paul anticipates the obvious question: "What purpose then does the law serve?"**

**Read rest of 19**

Here's the key. The commandments were in opposition to the promise but at the same time were an essential part of God's plan in causing people to see the reality of the promise.

Notice a couple of important things. First, the law was "added." It was supplementary. It didn't compete with God's promise, it was just placed beside it.

Second, it was added "because of transgressions." That word translated "because of," *charin*, can show aim or purpose. Here it shows aim.

You could paraphrase this, "It was added to show sins." God's law embodied in the 10 commandments, was added so that the Jews would have an objective standard external to themselves. A standard they couldn't rationalize away.

The law was (first) placed beside the promise (second) to make sin obvious (third) until the seed comes.

Jesus is the seed (singular) and He marked the end of the law.

Then (fourth) the law came third hand; from God to angels, to Moses to the mediator.

The promise of salvation was totally different. It was given directly by God to Abraham. It was unilaterally, unconditionally given and the law served the promise.

William Hendriksen, in his commentary on Galatians, says he cataloged 430 different interpretations of verse 20.

### **Read vs 20**

I think we can safely eliminate 429 of them and just say there was no mediator of the promise because it was one sided.

So here's the question,

### **Read vs 21a *Is the law then against the promises of God?***

Does the Bible contradict itself. Does it say you get to heaven by grace in one verse and then by keeping the commandments in another? ***Certainly not!***

## Read 21b-22

Here's the clincher. If God could have given a law for us to keep that would bring forgiveness and make us part of His family, He would have. He wouldn't have sacrificed His Son on a bloody cross.

God's law wasn't designed to set people free. It was actually designed to drive God's people, the Jews, to the promise. It was to show them they needed a Savior.

It was to confine them under sin until they realized there's no way out but Jesus.

Martin Luther expressed Paul's point with his usual forcefulness. He wrote: "The principle point of the law is to make men not better, but worse. That is to say, it shows them their sin, that by it's knowledge they may be humbled, terrified, bruised, and broken. And by this means may be driven to seek grace, and so come to that blessed seed who is Christ."

See, sometimes the very things that look like contradictions to God's promises are actually His method of fulfilling His promises.

Maybe life's come down on you pretty hard recently. Maybe you've prayed and claimed God's promises:

*...those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength...*

*... God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear...*

*...the God of peace will be with you...*

You've read the promises. You've prayed repeatedly. But, instead of strength, peace, and serenity just the opposite seems to be happening.

And you wondering, "Lord, why are all these things happening to me? Why do I feel like everything is falling apart?"

Remember, sometimes the very things that look like contradictions to God's promises are His method of fulfilling his promises.

God says, "You want peace? Then you'll have to learn to trust Me."

"You want strength? Let Me help you to quit hanging on to your puney resources and lean on Me. You'll find out what real strength is."

So many times those obstacles in life are really designed to challenge us, or even to drive us, to do something that's totally unnatural for us, to trust God.

Does God keep His promises? Yes He does. Is God trustworthy? Yes He is.

God is faithful to us and the demonstration of that faithfulness is Jesus Christ.

This past week Bill Maher, who used to host "Politically Incorrect" was a guest on MSNBC's "Scarborough County." Maher told Joe Scarborough:

"We are a nation that is unenlightened because of religion. I think that religion stops people from thinking. I think religion is a neurological disorder."

"When you look at beliefs in such things as, do you go to heaven, is there a devil, we have more in common with Turkey and Iran and Syria than we do with European nations and nations that I would consider more enlightened than us."

"When you were a kid and they were telling you whatever you believe in religion, do you think if they had switched the fairy tales that they read to you in bed with the Bible, you would know the difference?"

"Do you think if it was the fairy tale about a man who lived inside of a whale and it was religion that Jack built a beanstalk today, you would know the difference? Why do you believe in one fairy tale and not the other? Just because adults told you it was true and they scared you into believing it, at pain of death, at pain of burning in hell."

What Bill Maher has totally missed, is the truth and power of God's Word. Jack and the bean stalk may be a fun story but it never brought peace to a troubled soul. It's never given strength to the weak. It's never brought hope to the hopeless.

God's promises do all those things and more for one simple reason. They're God's promises. The Bible is alive and powerful. And it'll bring life to whoever will just take God at His word.

How about you this morning? Will you begin today to just simply take God at His word? Believe His promises?