

It's Always Yes!
Genesis 9: 8-17

It is often said that promises are made to be broken. That saying is part of a quote from Oliver Swift, the author of the classic book Gulliver's Travels. His entire quote is "promises and pie crusts are made to be broken". I suppose that might be a true statement, but only if we apply it to food and promises made by human beings.

Another popular saying is that promises are like babies, easy to make and hard to deliver. Mark Twain would agree. Most of us have probably read his classic book "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer", but we probably don't remember what he wrote there about making promises. In 1876 he wrote this: "To promise not to do a thing is the surest way in the world to make a body want to go and do that very thing". The words of the apostle Paul in Romans 7:19 come to mind:

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

I imagine most of us can relate to that, especially during this Lenten season. We promise not to do this or not to eat that, and suddenly, we have more opportunities than ever to do this and eat that. It is a battle of the will not to give in to temptation and our earthly desire to sin and go back on our word.

It is impossible to know how much pain and heartache broken promises have caused people to suffer throughout human history. **Broken promises often lead to broken relationships and broken spirits.** I can think of few things that may cause us more pain, heartache and even anger than the disappointment of a broken promise. Often it is the one who broke the promise who experiences the greatest heartache.

I suspect most of us can relate to that as well. One of the greatest pains we will experience comes from knowing that we have hurt someone emotionally or spiritually by not keeping our word. Those are the hardest wounds to heal, and perhaps that explains why so many people today refuse to make a commitment or a promise. There is often risk involved. If you never make a promise, you never have to risk breaking it.

The problem with that philosophy is plain to see yet widely overlooked. If we aren't willing to commit to anything, we will commit to nothing. The closest we will get to a promise is maybe. Unfortunately, Jesus doesn't give us that option. In Mathew 5:37, He says let what you say be simply yes or no; anything more than this comes from evil. Whether it is an oath, a promise, or a commitment, the same holds true. If we aren't willing to risk making a promise, either to God, to ourselves or to another person, we will miss out on the opportunity to develop the character and discipline that will help us to become the person God has created us to be. Without commitment, there will be no trust. How do you trust someone who refuses to make a commitment? You can't. You will always have a nagging doubt that the one you love, the one you trust is just a step away from leaving. You never truly get to know such a person, especially if that person is ourselves.

That is never a concern when it comes to the promises of God. Though President Obama once said that is always a bad practice to say always or never, the word never sometimes applies perfectly, and those are two good examples. **Though we can't trust ourselves to always keep our promises, we can always trust God to keep His.** God is never afraid to make promises and God always keeps them. This Book is filled with them. From the first promise God made with Noah and his descendants we just heard about, to the one Jesus made thousands of years later recorded in Johns 14:18 that He will not leave us as orphans, and the promise of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 1:13-14, Gods promises remain unbroken. They will always remain that way. You can bet your life on it.

Not only is God willing to make promises, God makes them in public for the entire world to see and believe. We can only try to imagine the devastation of the Great Flood. Images of the damage and destruction caused by the hurricanes give us a small clue. Witnessing the rampant sin in the world and the great destruction that wiped it out perhaps Noah had a nagging question in his mind- I wonder if that might happen again. God, should I keep the ark in dry dock? If I were God (and it's a very good thing I'm not) I would not have made the promise. I would have let Noah and his descendants live in holy fear of being washed away a second time if they didn't obey.

But our God, the God we love and serve is a God of choice and free will and rather than coerce Noah to live in constant fear of destruction God puts his concerns to rest. Verse 11- Noah, I am making a covenant- a promise- with you and your descendants. (That's us). Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood. Perhaps the most interesting part of Gods first promise to us is not the promise itself, but the sign of the promise found in verse 13. The rainbow is a visible sign of the promise. God's covenants are not private promises made in secret so if they are broken no one will ever know about it, but public promises, made for the entire world to see and remember. Only God can put a rainbow in the sky.

Even more interesting are verses 15 & 16. When I see the rainbow, I will see and remember. Apparently, God wanted to be reminded from time to time that a promise was made. Those times when God sees great disobedience, people hurting one another in thought and in deed, those times when people fail to keep the promises they made to Him and to each other, the reminder of the promise is there.

The fact is that the world once washed clean of sin by the flood was certain to get dirty again and bringing another flood would only serve as a temporary solution. Those of us who drive dirty automobiles or scrub floors for a living know exactly what that is like. God sees the rainbow and remembers not just the promise but the cross of Christ.

One of the reasons God was able to make that promise to Noah and to us is that another solution to the problem of sin, a permanent solution, was already in the works. Only the cross and the shed blood of Christ would be sufficient to cleanse the world of sin. Without the cross there would have to be many more floods. 2 Corinthians 1:20-22. **This promise and every promise of God is fulfilled through Jesus Christ.**

This text at least presents the possibility that God wants a reminder every now and then that important promises have been made. Remember that the rainbow appears only after the storm has passed. Since we are created in God's image and we also want to be reminded of God's promises from time to time, especially when the storm clouds are directly overhead, that is not so hard to understand.

Reminders of God's promises appear not just in the sky after a thunderstorm. If we choose to look for them, they are everywhere around us. Ponder a sunset or a red rose or the face of a special friend and consider how God re-reveals His promises to us, often exactly when we need to remember them. During this Lenten season, when our lack of faith may prevent us from making a promise or opportunity may tempt us to break a commitment we have made, let us remember the promises of Scripture and the rainbow that God put in the sky for us. Let us remember that Jesus said yes to the cross, and yes to die for us so that we might live. Let us say yes to His love and promise of eternal of eternal life, yes to worshiping the One who kept His promise to save us. Let us thank God for His grace and mercy that we can say yes, they are true. Amen.