

Title: The Anatomy of a Promise¹
Text: Hebrews 11.26
Theme: Fighting pleasure with Pleasure
Series: Hebrews # 43
Prop Stmtnt Nothing compares to the promises of God
Aim: I aim to help my people consider the pleasures of God as being more precious than anything else in this world.

Two weeks ago, when we studied this passage, I stated that in my opinion, v.26 is a great summary to this chapter, if not to the entire book. And yet, at the end of the sermon I really felt that I had not helped you make the connection between this truth and your life like I should have. So, I am going back to this verse in another attempt to do just that. I will summarize briefly. The author of Hebrews uses Moses as an example of faith. He considered the unfulfilled promises of God (the unseen) to be more precious than the promises of his world (the seen). On the basis of that consideration (belief) Moses made a series of decisions that God used to change the world and he holds Moses up before us and says, "Here, this is what faith looks like."

Now, our temptation is to think that Moses is this iconic figure of history who made these history-making decisions, and here we are, simple people who are happy when we can get our locker open at school, or get the kitchen faucet to stop leaking. However, while Moses made some big public decisions, they were preceded by small, personal ones. And that is where we live. As the people of God, we are called to make daily, personal, private decisions based on the promises of God. This morning, I want to help you see how to do that, because the fight for joy, the fight for faith, the fight for purity and the fight for perseverance all comes down to this: Are you willing to obey God because you believe in God's supreme delight in being God?

Read Text:

This week we were barraged with warnings of Snowmageddon, Snowapocalypse, the Blizzard of the Century, and on and on the dire warnings came. It was rather disappointing to go out Wednesday morning and find a rather usual winter snowfall on the ground. I realized why Kroger and Meijer are the main sponsors of the weather reports on the local TV stations.

So, what happens when you are promised one thing and it does not happen? Some times we are a bit more suspicious the next time we are promised something - aren't we? And yet, most of us would have to admit that we are usually willing to be fooled again the next time we are promised something. That is what is so perplexing. Some people believe every diet fad that comes along and have all of the books, pills, exercise equipment and stuff sold in infomercials to prove it. Others believe that their salvation is found in the lottery, or in cocaine, or alcohol, or (name your bondage) and like a child in an abusive home who keeps thinking that one day it will be different, the one in slavery to sin keeps going back time and time again. How can you rationally explain drug addiction? How can you rationally explain someone gambling away all of their savings? How can you rationally explain self-destruction through drinking? How do you rationally explain a girl who keeps going back to an angry boyfriend who cheats on her, physically beats her, and calls her horrific names? Controlling, demanding, stalking relationships

¹ John Piper's *The Pleasures of God* was very helpful in flushing out some of these concepts.

are sadly common. When you observe them from a distance, the problem seems so obvious, doesn't it? And one would logically think that the person who is being controlled, manipulated and stalked wants to get out. So, why do they, so often, keep going back?

We are prone to believe the promises of those who tell us what we already think. Even when their promises prove over and over to be lies, we still find it so difficult to disbelieve them because what they are promising is what our hearts want to hear. If we believe that money is the solution to all of our problems, then our hearts will be drawn to the promises of gambling or other get rich quick schemes. We will take risks that do not make sense because we believe that the reward is worth the risk. If we believe that being respected by others or being desired by others is essential to happiness, then we will do things, even lie and pretend in order to present ourselves as being worthy of respect or desire.

So, here is what I want you to see. Everybody lives believing somebody. Like the guy who wore a sign on the city sidewalk that said, "I'm a fool for Christ, whose fool are you?" We all follow somebody and believe their promises. And, contrary to popular thought, it DOES matter what you believe. It DOES matter who you follow.

Verses 25 -26 tell us that Moses was aware of the pleasures of sin and yet, he considered the reproach of Christ to be more valuable than the treasures of Egypt. Since I already addressed Moses' situation a couple of weeks ago, I will not repeat that today. But I want us to have a grid in order to look at the anatomy of a promise so that we can learn how to live as we are called, and live pursuing and being satisfied with joy from God, because nothing else will do. So, in your bulletin is the grid that is designed to help you press on with joy by fighting the "pleasure" (fleeting) with Pleasure (Eternal). In order to fight pleasure with Pleasure, we have to have a God-centered view of pleasure since God is one who made Pleasure because He is infinitely full of pleasure. When we sin, it is not because we are seeking pleasure, it is because we are not seeking it enough. We sin because we are willing to settle for cheap, when God offers real. This grid is simply a tool to help you apply that concept. It is designed to help you examine the anatomy of the promises that are competing for your heart. In order to fully appreciate this tool, we need to look at who is behind the promises.

We are vulnerable to promises because we, by nature are unsatisfied beings. We were made by God for God. We were designed to be dependent upon God alone and therefore satisfied by God alone. But ever since sin came onto the stage, we have attempted to be satisfied with lesser things. We sin because we do not consider God glorious enough to satisfy our hearts. Sin, therefore is the belittling of God because we devalue his worth as the ultimate source of our joy. But sin never satisfies. Its pleasures are fleeting. And we, who were made to be full, live with a gnawing sense of emptiness. We were made to be satisfied, but sin has caused us to be dissatisfied. We crave, we hunger, we long and in our dissatisfaction and spiritual blindness, we are easily duped into believing the wrong promises. We assume that we can trust our own hearts, which we cannot, because even they will lie to us. As human beings made in the image of God, we were made with an immense longing. We all have a raging thirst and driving hunger. Satan knows this and exploits us with his lies that promise to quench that thirst and satisfy that hunger. And, (remember what I said earlier about being prone to believe the promises of what we already believe to be true) because our own hearts lie to us, we are very quick to believe Satan's lies and

very slow to believe God. Our longing is so intense, and our spiritual blindness so deep that even though the promises of sin betray us again and again, we are still willing to believe them. The shriveled, shaking body of a crack addict is a reflection of the shriveled heart of every person addicted to the promises of this world. Sin robs us blind, even as we willingly give our heart away to it. Our bondage to the lies is so deep that it is impossible for us to believe God, unless God acts upon us and opens our eyes to his glorious grace.

Let me illustrate. Let's say that you are a 13-year old girl. Like every person on this planet you feel a sense of lostness and isolation, wondering where you fit in, or even if you fit in. You look at your world and you see how it treats beautiful looking people, so you conclude, "beautiful people are happy" because they get attention, they have friends, they get respect, and things tend to go their way. So, the promise that you believe is: "If I am beautiful, I will be happy." This "promise" governs your life. It becomes a filter through which you look at life. Whenever you see a beautiful person who seems to be happy, you accept that as validation for your promise. Whenever you see a person who is happy, but is not necessarily beautiful, you dismiss them as being an anomaly. For you, beauty becomes the means by which you pursue happiness because you believe that only in acquiring beauty can you ever get happiness. So, what is your conclusion when you are not happy? Of course, you conclude that you are not beautiful. And when someone asks you what's wrong and you say, "I'm not beautiful" how do most people respond? They say, "Oh yes you are!" And now, you have allies in your cause. Now you have recruited others who try to prop you up by telling you how beautiful you are and in so doing, they are simply reinforcing the promise by which you live. (Seriously, how many people will actually agree with you and say, "Y'know honey, I see your point.") How are you therefore tempted to view God? You want God to make you beautiful so that you can be happy? And so you pray stuff like, "God, fix my nose." or "God, change my face." So, instead of worshiping God, you want God to be your plastic surgeon so that you can be happy. The problem is, you are living your life on a false promise. It will never satisfy.

Scenario #2: You are a 45-year old parent. Your child is getting ready to graduate from high school. As a parent, you want your child to be successful, why, because successful children have proud and therefore happy parents. Besides, you don't want to pay their cell phone bill anymore either. So, the success of your child is the means by which you can achieve happiness and you long for happiness. You are hungry for respect. You are thirsty for security. There is an inextinguishable desire for significance and you believe that the success of your child is the path that gets you there. The promise that you are holding to is: My child will make me happy, which being interpreted means; my child will be my Messiah and will satisfy the thirst in my soul. How successful does your child have to be, before you are happy? Let me ask you the obvious question. Will your child ever be successful enough to give you the happiness that will satisfy your soul? NO!! There is nothing in this world, no treasure of Egypt can satisfy our souls.

The promises of this world, like the treasures of Egypt are cheap substitutes for the promises of God. The promises of this world, the rules of this world, the thinking of this world, the values of this world are all a reflection of the character and values of Satan. Satan does not have true joy and therefore cannot give any to you. He will still promise it and will keep promising it and will keep promising it, but he cannot give it to you. He cannot satisfy you because he himself is not satisfied. He cannot quench your thirst because he desires all of the wrong things. Therefore,

every thing that he offers to you has a hook that he has to hide, or a consequence that he has to distract you from by convincing you that you are the exception to the rule. Behind every promise of the world is the unsatisfied, bitter, hateful, hostile prince of the power of the air. Consider this. What we long for, and set our heart upon is what will define us. "The worth and excellency of a soul is to be measured by the object of its love." (Henry Scougal) Satan's desire, Satan's longing is not for God, it is to be God; that is to replace God. He has set his heart on idolatry. His chief end, his all-consuming passion and drive is the destruction of God, which cannot and will not ever happen. Therefore, Satan is doomed to defeat and damned for eternity, which means that all of his rules and promises are doomed to defeat and will damn those who follow them.

Contrast that with God. God is at once and forever the most excellent and glorious of all beings. He has true, eternal, abiding, all-satisfying, soul-nourishing, thirst-quenching, hunger-filling delight. His command to "love the Lord your God with all your heart" is a command to come and drink at the fountain of his pleasures so that your soul is at rest. Paul said in 2 Cor. 3.18 that as we behold (look at, consider) the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another. Do you see what he is saying here? What we long for and set our hearts upon is what will define us. When we set our hearts upon God, when we consider the perfections of his being, the supremacy of position, and the absolute infinity of his love, joy and power, then our desire is for God. Satan promises to make much of you. When you follow his promises, you are believing his lies and cooperating in his futile attempt to make much of you instead of making much of God. God's promises are rooted in his supreme joy and self-sufficient delight as God. God is completely happy, and fully satisfied as God. He does not need food to function, or rest to recover. He needs nothing outside of himself. His waters of self-replenishing joy never evaporate and never have to be resupplied by anything outside of himself. From eternity past God has been perfect and complete in Himself and does not need us to fill up any longing that he has. Therefore, his promises are rooted in Himself who is already satisfied and does not need to use you to get what He is lacking. He lacks nothing, which means that He is full of Himself, which for Him and for us is a glorious thing. When we are full of ourselves, it is idolatry, when God is full Himself, it means that He is supremely satisfied and full of delight. Every promise of God for you is designed that you might be satisfied in God, because nothing else will do. Every promise of God for you is ultimately fulfilled in Christ because Christ is the only fountain from whom our soul's thirst-quenching waters flow. Christ is the love and the joy and happiness and the security that we have longed for all of our lives.

Now you are ready to see that the gospel is not only gracious in appearance, it is glorious because it is rooted in grace. God is not obligated to save us. God was never coerced to do anything for us. God, in order to magnify the supreme value of his infinite righteousness and glorious grace made a way for sinners to have the right and the authority to "delight in God without obscuring the glory of God." This is so important for you to grasp. The cross is not ultimately about God making much of us, it God, making much of his glorious grace and love. The death of Christ was the means by which sinners can have access to God because only God can satisfy our hungry, thirsty and empty souls. Therefore (don't miss this now), faith is making much of God's glory because faith considers the promises of God as being more important, more sure, more valuable, more satisfying, more joyful, more filling and fulfilling than any promise of this world.

That is why the decision of Moses is such a powerful illustration of this. He considered the promises of God, knowing that if he followed them, he would take upon himself the reproach that Christ would ultimately and fully bear. When you follow the promises of God, you do not fit in. In fact, you stand out, and your life exposes the lies of this world and causes those who believe those lies to be very uncomfortable with you. But, you are not missing out. You are not like the sad little child looking with droopy eyes and pouting lips looking through the window of the candy store longing for a taste. Oh no, when we like Moses consider the promises of God and consider the God who makes the promises, and now consider all that we have in Christ, our soul sings with delight at being satisfied in him. Being full of the Pleasures of Christ satisfies our souls so that we are not as vulnerable to the fleeting pleasures of this world. That is how we win the fight for purity, for perseverance, and humility. But, in order to choose the Pleasures of God over the pleasure of this world, we have to behold, we have to consider, we have to look at and set our gaze upon the person and the promises of God. We become what we take the time to behold. It is necessary to behold daily what we have in Christ. In Christ we have forgiveness. In Christ we have love. In Christ we have joy. In Christ we have resurrection, eternal life, and eternal pleasures. Through faith alone in Christ alone, we are declared righteous. When I consider the Giver of the promise, and respond with faith-driven obedience, then I am demonstrating to my world that God alone is the sole-sufficient, soul-satisfying hope of my life. Pressing on with joy is the public relations campaign that God has established to show to the world that He alone is the fountain from which springs waters of thirst-quenching joy.

Tool for comparing the Promises of God against the promises of our world:

1. Identify the Promise.

- Write it out

2. Examine the promise.

- What is it the reward that is being promised?
- What is the cost?
- Is there clear and compelling evidence that what is promised is indeed true?
- Does the promise tell you the entire story?

3. Examine the one giving the promise.

- Can they be trusted? (character)
- Can they deliver? (competency)
- Do they have your best interest at heart?
- Can they satisfy you forever?

4. Who are you going to believe?