

Promises Gripp'd

Joshua 10:1-15

Introduction: When you trust someone completely you are willing to make requests of them, knowing that if they say "yes", they will do it. This is why I've received a machine gun barrage of requests from my girls the last few days. They are looking for me to say any form of "yes", because if I do, they know they can hold me to it (daddy, you said we could/you would).

I remember listening to our 8-track system to a song that basically said, "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me." Now this kind of phrase can easily be token and pithy, but it really gets down to the heart of all of life. Do we take God at His Word. If we do, does it color the rest of our life, how we think, how we view circumstances, and how we approach God. If we truly take God at His Word, it should motivate us in the present to seek Him to answer and fulfill His Word. This is one of the great truths of God as we know Him from the Bible. He is not bribed nor is He appeased by our manipulation, but in Christ He hears our prayers, listens, and answers according to His nature and promise. His is not whimsical or changing, but we can know Him because He has made Himself known. The question that we are faced with today: **do we take God at His Word, do we know the God of His Word, and do we audaciously seek Him in prayer based on what He promised us.**

I. The Context

Israel was faced with a lifetime of decisions that came as a result of a misguided, short-sighted, and deception driven decision they made to enter into a covenant relationship with a city called Gibeon (which was the lead city of a 4 city coalition - Josh. 9:17). Gibeon knew that they were next on the list to get wiped out by Israel after they had razed and burned Jericho and Ai, so they did what desperate people do: they took the one in a million shot. They deceived Israel by flattery, holding back information, misinformation, and outright lying. However, Israel had an opportunity to consult with the Lord, who would have exposed the deception. Sadly, **they did not ask counsel from the Lord** (Josh. 9:14) and made a binding covenant with a people they were supposed to wipe out.

Chapter 10 deals with the immediate **consequence** of this bad decision, but also unfolds the **faithful promises** of God in the long term, which are not thwarted, even by our bad decisions and choices. There would be an ongoing cost of Israel's choice: they would have to go to war FOR Gibeon, costing them time, life, and credibility. **They would live with this decision the rest of their days (and their children's days), but they would not be defined by it.** This is because God was still going to uphold His end of the promise and was still going to secure the promised land for them. Taking the Promised Land would look differently than Israel had first imagined it, but it would certainly get done as long as they continued to walk in faith.

This is what we must keep in mind when we are dealing with present and future consequences from past decisions. Each of us in here have decisions in our past we wish we could have back, moments of indiscretion that we would redo if there was an ability to do so. **But did those bad decisions mean that we are not longer able to accomplish God's will, or did we somehow miss the will of God for our future.** Just as Joshua took comfort that they would still be given the Promised Land, we take similar comfort in what God is doing in our life:

"And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Philippians 1:6

God's will for us is that He will complete our salvation at the day of Christ's return for us. This will not be stopped. God will take all of our bad decisions, all of the consequences, all of our sin and redeem it one

day completely so that we will be holy and prepared to live with Jesus for all of eternity. The hope we have today is that even if life is difficult today and may not improve or turn out the way we thought, God is working right now in every area of your life to prepare you for eternity.

Now we turn back to the story of an amazing miracle brought about by audacious faith in God's promises, where we learn not only of our hope for the future but of the power of gripping God's promises in the present.

II. The Story

News of Israel's defeats travelled quickly among the city-states of Canaan. It did not take a great military strategist to understand what Israel was doing: they were targeting the central part of Canaan (known as the Benjamin Plateau). If they could control this strategic area, they could launch campaigns down to the North and South. This led to **5 city-states** to join together to fight: **Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon** joined together to fight. Yet, they didn't attack Israel head on, but instead waged war against their old friend Gibeon. They brought out all of their forces with only one intention in mind: wipe out this traitor and weaken the resolve and word of Israel (10:5). This caused Israel to make its move, which was to mobilize its troops, travel the nearly 25 miles from Gilgal to Gibeon, and wage war with the Amorite super-pac.

There are a few highlights to look at in this story:

1. God reassured Joshua that He had given them into his hands -

Joshua 10:8 - *"And the Lord said to Joshua, 'Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you.'*

This was clearly nothing new, not a revolutionary new promise from God, but one that Joshua needed to hear again. He needed to know that God was with him, and when God is with him, no one could stand against. This is exactly why we do not often need NEW INFORMATION but need to be REASSURED OF WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW.

2. God would fight for them - God was at the forefront of their battles before this, but He was clearly the main object of fighting here. God as a warrior is part of His character (see Exodus 15:3) and He showed this in the battle against the Amorites:

- The **Lord threw** them into a panic (10:10)
- The **Lord threw down** large stones from heaven (10:11), killing more by this than by the sword. This was as the Amorites were running down the ascent of Beth-horon, trying to get away by a narrow and ascending passageway. This was clearly miraculous, because they were targeted at the Amorites alone, large enough to kill, and broad enough to stretch down to Azekah.
- The **Lord stopped** the sun to prolong the day to give them over to Israel (10:12) (NOTE: Much debate has been given to *how* the sun was stopped. Some have thought it to be a total **eclipse**, which would actually provide shade for Joshua's troops; Some have said it was simply a **poetic interpretation**, not an actual event but one for poetry, thus the reference to a poetic work called the Book of Jashar; but read literally, it means that the light of day **was prolonged**, which is the overwhelming view of most conservative scholarship and closest to the text. How this happened? Did the earth's rotation slow? Did the earth tilt suddenly? Was there a refraction or extension of the sun's rays on a local level? How God accomplished this, we cannot be sure, but we know that He responded to Joshua's request, and in so doing, accomplished the campaign against the Amorites.)

- The **Lord obeyed and answered** the request of Joshua because He fought for Israel (10:14)

3. Joshua fought this battle with strategy and prayer - Joshua trusted God's Word, that the defeat would be his, but he also hiked 25 miles (most likely in the dark of night) to provide a surprise attack against the forces of the Amorites. Joshua never prayed and sat on his hands. He used sound, logical, and reasonable action to accomplish what God had assured him.

4. God accomplished His will, just in a different way than Joshua thought - All the Amorite forces Joshua needed to destroy ended up coming out of their walled cities and attacked an ally. This meant that in one battle, God took out 5 major cities. Instead of having to go one by one, God orchestrated plans in such a way that actually achieved victory in a more decisive way. The disappointment of bad decisions turned into a great victory. God still does this today. Do we believe it?

III. The Principles Gleaned

What Joshua believed about God's promises

Joshua 10:12-13 - *At that time Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon." And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies.*

- He believed God was **greater than the circumstance**

It's clear that Joshua had a great amount of faith in God, but also believed that God could do tremendous things. Joshua knew what God had said, but observed the situation at hand, and decided to pray what seemed to be logical to achieve the promised goal: have the sun stand still, prolong the day, and not allow the enemy to take the cover of night as protection. Joshua believed that God was big, and this is no small thing. The question is, are we big godders or small godders? In other words, do we believe that God will do what He says or do we think God cannot accomplish certain things. Let's take a test together to see where we land on the scale of our belief in a big or small god.

The big vs. small God test:

A little god life:

- Small, infrequent prayers that are only uttered when feeling absolutely desperate. When no answer seems to be given, prayer is abandoned seeking answers elsewhere.
- Fixed on what God CANNOT do rather than what He can and will do
- High anxiety - anxiety is bred out of the inability to know what the future holds and the inability to control the present.
- Emotional worship - light with no heat. Worship becomes an activity that is based on where life seems to be, on the venue of worship, and whether our affections are moved externally
- Discontent
- Fear - of the uncertainty of the future; the type of fear that keeps us away from God (because of guilt, shame, or sin)
- Elevation of self - in ministry, evangelism, service, problem solving, family, work, financial planning. This is bred from a high level of self-reliance, strength, and trust.

A big God life:

- Consistent, persistent, faith driven, large, audacious prayer that continues even when the answer is clearly "wait"; this prayer is willing to pray for all the promises that God has given
 - Believes that when God speaks, it is done; Not only focuses on what God CAN and WILL do, but rests and expects it
 - Contentment in all circumstances
 - Trust in the Sovereign God, thus a low level of anxiety
 - Worship that is characterized by light and heat - burns from truth and explodes in the light of affection
 - Denial of self - not going above what God has called us to, but playing our role properly as God has called us to
 - Proper fear of the Lord - the type that draws us to Him, not away from Him
- He believed God would **deliver** on His promise

The reason Joshua prayed such an audacious prayer was that he actually believed God would deliver on exactly what He promised. When God said, 'not a man will stand', he believed it. This compelled him to not only pray for big things but to live in faith driven ways. It allowed him to exhaust his troops to travel through the night, knowing that victory would be secure. He put his life at risk because he believed God would not turn His back.

- He believed God would **answer**, so he could act

Joshua did not pray and then watch the hail stones fly from heaven, taking in the show from the top of the hill. No, the assurance of God's action compelled him to action. He did not think that his actions prompted God's actions, yet because he knew God would act cleared the way for Joshua to take the fight unto the end. This is the essence of **praying God's promises**. We pray and request what has been promised, and then act and obey passionately and faithfully. The assurance of God's response means we can risk, be aggressive, and act on what we prayed. This is true in areas of **serving the poor, evangelism, loving each other, being patient with our spouse, training our children, and working for a difficult boss**. We pray for these things, but God also gives clear commands in these areas. This means that we continue to pray but are compelled to act, working hard in light of His promises. This is where faith in God's grace fuels our obedience and knowledge of God's will motivates us to work until the end.

IV. The Takeaways

What keeps us from praying audacious prayers of God's promises. Or to say it another way, what keeps us in a level that we pray token, sporadic, non-specific, faithless, and powerless prayers that are not answered and thus are not effective in our life with Christ. There are reasons in our thinking that hinder our praying with audacity:

- We can pray **fearfully**

Matthew 6:9-10 - *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be **your name**. Your kingdom come, **your will** be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

Sometimes what keeps away from praying God's promises and will is the fact that we do believe he will do it, but we are not sure we want His will, since it will be something different than what we want. We have the wrong kind of fear, the fear that God will lead us down a path of growth, sanctification, and usefulness, which would necessitate us to go through trial, persecution, and suffering. Notice that when

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, there was a simple theme in the first part. We pray to, through, and unto God. It is **His name, His kingdom, and His will** being done. When we pray for our name, our kingdom, or our will, we not only miss out on answers to our prayer, but we miss out on glorifying God altogether.

When we pray, we must remember that in faith, we pray according to God's name. It is He who is to be revered, acknowledged, and praised. We pray according to His kingdom, that which will be set up under His rule and leadership and that should be reflected by how we live today. It is according to His will, which means we want the outcome of our prayer to be what God wants, not us, and we want our desires to match with whatever God's will is. **One of the most simple, faith-driven, profound, and effective prayers we can pray: May your will be done in this _____.** In acknowledging this, we can praise God, trust Him, grow, and be refined no matter the actual outcome of the prayer. Our prayer should start and end with the emphasis on God, not ourselves.

- We can pray **faithlessly**

James 1:5-7 - *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, **who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.** But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. **For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double minded man, unstable in all his ways.***"

There are prayers are not answered in the worst way. These are prayers that are uttered, but only raise as far as the ceiling. These are prayers that are prayed without faith, prayed in doubt, prayed without the belief that God will actually accomplish it. Think about how often you have gone through the motion of prayer, praying in a token way, asking for safety, health, or blessing without actually thinking that God would do the things we asked for, or thought that those would be accomplished without God's action or not. Now, it is absolutely true that God cares about and brings about the small and big: the same God who forgives sin is the same who provides daily bread (Matt. 6:11-12). **But when we pray for "little" things without thought of God doing it, we pray without faith.** In the text of James 1, the issue was trial, that when trials hit, we must pray that God would give wisdom to walk through trials well. The faithless prayer does not seek wisdom nor God, but only a cessation of trial. The faithless prayer doubts God, the reason for trial, and the ability for God to bring us through. We must pray in faith, believing that God is, that He is sovereign, and He will deliver on His promises. This is why James said in **James 4:15** *Instead you ought to say, 'if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'*"

- When we pray **ignorantly**

James 4:2 - You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. **You do not have because you do not ask."**

What is the best way to have weak, unanswered prayer? Simply keep yourself ignorant of what God has promised. Most everyone in the world will pray at some point, asking God to get them out of a situation, through a test, or through pain, usually with some bargaining chip attached (get me through this, and I will _____). The reason we do not ask God is that we do not know what He has promised. We don't know that no one will take us from His hand, that He will never leave us or forsake us, that He will complete His work in us, that He will build His church, that we can love our wives like Christ loved the church, that we can be Spirit filled and thus have the fruit produced by the Spirit, and that we can make disciples of all nations. Ignorance to God's promises stunts our growth and ability to pray persistent prayers. It's not only that we fail to pray, we fail to pray according to how God has called us to pray.

One of the great treasures that we possess is Scripture, in its entirety, authority, and sufficiency. One of the best ways to pray God's promises is to pray Scripture. Not only pray as a result of reading Scripture, but literally reciting exactly what the Bible says, quoting the promises contained. I will guarantee that if you start this practice you will find not only a new clarity and passion for God's Word, but newfound passion in prayer.

- When we pray **selfishly**

James 4:3-4 - You ask and do not receive, because **you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions**. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Beware the selfish prayer. The final best way to keep our prayer life light, ineffective, and token is simply to focus on our selves. When all we pray is for **material possessions, physical blessing, or physical gain**, we will not receive what we ask for. It is not that God is anti-possession or enjoyment in this world, since He is the giver of every good gift. The problem comes when we think God exists as our own personal genie in a bottle that delivers to us whatever our selfish heart desires. Instead, we need much wisdom in how to live on this earth and not love this earth, to treasure the Creator rather than the creation, which we are so prone to. It does not mean we should not ask for material things, but what is the purpose in asking? Is it to make much of Christ? Is it to treasure Him more? Is it so the world will see God's answer and worship as a result? James 4 goes on to give us clues to the antidote of selfish prayer:

- Humility
- Submission
- Resistance
- Purity
- Proper depth of understanding of our sin

Let's begin to pray this way, in a way that reflects God's promises, not our own selfish desires.

Do we take God at His Word? When God says it, do we believe it, and does it settle it for us?

Promises Gripped

Joshua 10:1-15

What Joshua believed about God's promises

- He believed God was greater than the circumstance
- He believed God would deliver on His promise
- He believed God would answer, so he could act

What keeps us from praying audacious prayers of God's promises:

- We can pray **fearfully**
- We can pray **faithlessly**
- When we pray **ignorantly**
- When we pray **selfishly**