

“Broken Promises”

Matthew 26:31-35

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Do you remember the first promise you broke? Did you make that promise expecting to fulfill it? What happened? What did you learn from that experience?

I'm not sure that Peter could tell us the first promise he broke, but I am confident he could tell us the most memorable one. It occurred the night that Jesus was arrested and tortured prior to his crucifixion. Three times Peter denied even knowing Jesus when confronted by people that tried to link him to Jesus. What made these denials more devastating for Peter was the fact that they happened after he so boldly predicted they would not.

“Then Jesus told them, ‘This very night you will all fall away on account of me for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. But, after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.’

Peter replied, ‘Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘this very night before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.’ Peter declared, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the other disciples said the same” Matthew 26:31-35.

Those were pretty bold words, no lack of courage in them. And I am convinced that Peter meant every word he said. He loved and appreciated Jesus and wanted to be faithful to him. I believe he was willing to die for Jesus until he got the chance.

I see too much of myself in Peter to be comfortable. This story makes me squirm. I know what it is like to have good intentions yet break promises.

What's the lesson for us this morning? Promises made in the security of friends will be tested in a hostile environment. This means three things.

Be careful what you promise. Would you buy a home without knowing the price? How about a car, boat or even clothes? I doubt that anyone here today would be that carefree or irresponsible. For most of us, the price will influence and maybe even determine our decision.

Promises need to be approached with the same scrutiny. If at all possible, look at the price you will have to pay to keep a promise. Before getting married, going to college, pursuing a career, opening a business, playing an instrument, becoming a ball player or joining a church, ask those that have been down that road what you should expect. Each decision comes with a price. Find the tag before you agree to buy it.

Get ready to be tested in ways you never imagined. When Peter became a disciple, I don't think he ever envisioned being tempted to deny Jesus and certainly never thought he would be a coward. However, both happened and look at how his spiral of denial occurred. A lowly servant girl confronted him while they were standing around an open fire (Matthew 26:69). The catalyst for his denial was not Pilate, the Sanhedran nor the angry mob, but an obscure servant. He was completely caught off guard.

How many times have I listened to the confession of a promise breaker that said, “I never dreamed I would ever do that. How could I have been so naïve and foolish?”

I have a friend that was a strong supporter of a governor of another state. He raised a lot of money for this successful politician. As a matter of fact, he raised more money for this governor than anyone during the entire campaign.

Once elected, my friend said to the new governor, "Don't do anything while in office to embarrass your family, lose your job or jeopardize your eternal destination. Be honest, faithful and a man of impeccable character."

I recently talked with my friend on the phone. I knew he would need consoling after the news broke of this governor's affair with a woman that he did favors for to keep quiet. I watched the news conference where this governor broke down and cried and said, "I have sinned."

I haven't talked to this latest powerful, public figure to trip and fall but if I had the opportunity, I think I know what he would say. "I can't believe that I was so naïve and foolish. I never dreamed my behavior would lead to this."

Broken promises are hard to swallow, aren't they? They spread disillusionment and misery everywhere. This is why we must be on guard at all times and understand that temptation will come from the most unsuspecting sources during the most unusual times.

Finally, stay close to Jesus with an attitude of humility. The way I see it, Peter made two mistakes that dreadful night. He overestimated his ability and underestimated the power of temptation. That was and still is a lethal combination.

I agree with William Barclay who wrote, "We shall only be safe when we replace the confidence which boasts by the humility which knows its weakness and which depends not on itself, but seeks the help of Christ." The secret to keeping promises is found in a relationship with Christ that provides wisdom, courage, strength and determination. I know of no substitute.

On a mountainside the wind was blowing fiercely. A wise Alpine guide grabbed a climber and shouted, "On your knees, on your knees! It is not safe here except on your knees." I know many places and times when this is true.

What if you have broken a promise and find yourself reeling in disbelief like Peter was that awful night? Is there any hope for you? I am glad to say there is. Our Lord is an expert at healing wounds that our broken promises have caused. He is also good at helping us to forgive ourselves so that we can make new promises, informed, enlightened and fortified promises.

Do you need to be forgiven today and given another chance? So did Peter and the Lord gladly restored him. I hope you will let Him help you, too.