

HOW FAITH IS ASSURED

Genesis 15

Sermon for Peace Church

October 11, 2009

PURPOSE – In the context of the fears of life, call people to faith, with the Cross as assurance that God will keep his promises for new life and a new earth!

MAIN IDEA – The fulfillment of God’s promises requires the new life of a son – something assured to us by Jesus’ death on the Cross.

I. INTRODUCTION

Let’s open our Bibles to Genesis 15 ...

... returning to the story of Abram and his journey of faith.

1. That journey began with a great promise:

- “Leave your country, your people, your father’s house ... go to the land I will show you ... *and I will bless you and make you a blessing to all nations!*”, God said to Abram.

(i) AND US today! - Above allegiance to country, people, father & mother ... come, follow Me, says Jesus ... *and I will bless you and make you a blessing to all nations!*

That is the promise & destiny of every Christian, every church! – *Blessed to be a blessing!*

Abram’s faith journey is ours! He went to Canaan. We go to Christ. But the promise is the same:

BLESSED in the heavenly realms with EVERY spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3) ...

WHY? – TO BE A channel of God’s BLESSING to others.

(ii) FAITH receives this promise, believes it, and lives in it!

- That's what Abram does - the "Father of Faith" (Rom. 4)

He had many sons (know that song?) ... are you one of them?

2. In our last study of Abram's faith, God's promise took him to battle – to recapture Lot (cause as family, he was part of this destiny) ... and to recapture all of Sodom's goods from a coalition of 4 kings who had conquered them.

- That faith led him to give a tithe of those spoils to King Melchizedek of Salem, servant of God Most High – receiving his blessing, giving God glory for his victory. Faith tithes, recognizing that God gives victory..

- That faith then led him also to REFUSE any of those spoils for his own keeping lest the King of Sodom think he made Abram rich.

GOD IS THE POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN & EARTH!

(i) So we left Abram's faith at a HIGH POINT:

Battling / conquering / tithing / refusing worldly identity.

3. Chapter 15 begins with Abram's faith in a very different place:

Verse 1 - *After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:*

"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

II. FAITH'S FIGHT - FEAR

...*"Don't be afraid, Abram!"* ABRAM'S FAITH IS WRESTLING WITH FEAR!

= the enemy of faith.

= the enemy of *"God's perfect love that CASTS OUT fear"* – 1 Jn. 4:18

Yet in this age it can be a challenge to REST CENTERED in that perfect love.

1. We're not exactly sure what Abram was afraid of.

(i) It may have been a fear of REPRISAL from the 4 Mesopotamian kings he had just plundered. They'd travelled west & conquered Sodom, Gomorrah and a few other cities. Then they'd been jumped in a surprise attack by Abram and his small army! Would they regroup and come after him?

That may have been on his heart – for God does say to Abram, “I am your SHIELD!”

A. There are so many forces in this world beyond our control –

- like the economy – will I have my job next month>

- like who will move next door, what will my next boss will be like, what will my health be like? ... God says, “I AM YOUR SHIELD” ... I AM YOUR PROTECTOR!

(ii) Another fear that may have been on Abram's heart concerned his decision to give back all of Sodom's wealth to the King of Sodom.

At the time he knew it was the right thing to do, but now lying in bed at night ... he may be wondering!

➤ “Sarai's always been wanting that dishwasher ... did I do the right thing? ... where am I going to get the resources for that?”

You ever have that happen? At the time you make a decision ... then later you think:

“Boy, that was a huge bid I put on that silent auction! Did I do the right thing?”

= Perhaps his faith was wrestling with second thoughts & related fears

A. God says to Abram: I AM YOUR VERY GREAT REWARD!

> “Decisions made to honor Me will be rewarded by ME!”

= His perfect love casts out our fears ... Hear His Word!

2. That word from the Lord ministers to Abram and prompts him next to share the DEEPEST CONCERN on his heart.

This concern directly relates to the PROMISE & DESTINY God has given him ... and EVERY person of faith in this age.

Let's read the rest of the chapter – **Read Genesis 15:2-20**

III. FAITH'S NEED – The Son & Soil

1. The deepest concern on Abram's heart, as a man of faith, is that HE NEEDS A CHILD. He needs NEW LIFE. **The promise & destiny need a SON!**

Through his seed all nations would be blessed & Abram's family would bring salvation to earth – that was his destiny! Yet ... he didn't yet have a son!

10 YEARS earlier God had promised him a son – when he & Lot split company on the hill of Bethel. TEN YEARS! ... that's a long time of infertility!

A. So Abram's afraid that his destiny is in jeopardy - and that his inheritance – material & SPIRITUAL - will go to a foreigner, Eliezer of Damascus (that was the common practice back then - if one had no son, you'd kind of “adopt” one of your servants to receive the inheritance).

THE PROMISE & DESTINY NEED A SON

2. Looking at this story through the lens of the New Covenant, can you see how Abram's concern is no different than yours & mine?

God has said that He is going to bring a new kingdom on earth – but how can I be part of it?

(i) I am mortal. I live, I die. I'm like the grass of the field that rises, withers & falls. How can I be part of an eternal kingdom?

A. This is the human dilemma. If all we are is our 3 score & 10 (70 years), what meaning has life? It's meaningless!

= NIHILISM – The father of that philosophy – Frederich Nietzsche declared, “There is no meaning to life.”

And quite logically, toward the end of his life, he became INSANE!
I give him credit! He wrestled honestly with life in this age, apart from God.

3. We need NEW LIFE beyond the realities of this age & our mortality.

- That's what Abram's desire for a SON represents – CONTINUITY, RE-GENERATION, HERITAGE, PERPETUITY - a part of God's ongoing story.

(i) In the Old Covenant, that's always what the longing for a son represents – Rachel, Rebecca, Manoah, Ruth, Hannah – “Give me a son, lest I die in meaninglessness!”

= It was their way of saying – according to the amount of revelation they had then received, “I want a heritage. I want to be part of the eternal story being developed in this age.”

(ii) In the New Covenant, we declare that that eternal life came & lived among us!

- It is Jesus – the Christ – the Son
- He is NEW LIFE. And you must be born again of that life in order to be part of God's eternal story

1 John 5:12 – *“He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

A. DO YOU HAVE THE SON? Does He live in you?

Do you know His holiness within transforming your thoughts, values, motives, desires? Do you have His Spirit living in YOUR OWN BODY?

- The SON is God's blessing for humanity ... and you must have that son in order to BE A BLESSING and part of God's story.

ABRAM'S CRY IS OURS!

4. So here's what God says to Abram – and all who share his concern:

Verse 4 – *“Eliezer will not be your heir, but a SON coming from your own body!”*

Then God takes Abram outside his tent (all this prayer dialogue is happening at night – the time when fears more readily bubble to the surface).

“Look up at the heavens”, God continues, see the stars – count them, if you can! ... So shall your offspring be!”

(i) That’s Christian star-gazing! Look up at the stars, even in highly lit Chicagoland ... COUNT THEM! – So shall your offspring be!

= the company of the saints is innumerable!

A. The apostle John was given a revelation of those stars, encircling God’s throne, numbering thousands upon thousands, ten thousand TIMES ten thousand, singing, WORTHY IS THE LAMB (Rev. 5).

- They are Abram’s descendants, they are the company of those united with the life of the Son!

5. God promises Abram the NEEDED SON to fulfill his spiritual destiny.

- That promise in Christ is for you & me!

(i) Verse 6 – *And Abram BELIEVED the Lord!*

Wow! - He’s around 80 years old! He & Sarai still infertile!

A. He believed God for regeneration – and God credited that belief as righteousness. Faith takes those promises of God & TRUSTS them – even when they require miracles.

B. How can human beings spiritually dead to God be made alive?

God promises you a Son. His Spirit will come to you.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT YOU CAN BE BORN AGAIN?

6. ABRAM DID! And when the Lord received that faith, He affirmed His promise of the LAND.

Verse 7 – I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.

(i) We too in the new covenant are promised the LAND. Those of faith, those in whom the Son lives are promised the NEW EARTH.

Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth – Jesus promises (Mt. 5:5)

A. God's promise to Abram foretells this.

His physical lineage received this land that God promised them – the land of Canaan. Under King Solomon, Israel's borders did extend from Egypt to the Euphrates (v. 20)

- That was the Old Covenant which Jesus fulfilled.

B. But in fulfilling that covenant to God's people, the promise of the land is not dismissed. No! It's expanded to all the earth. Those of faith – those of Abram's spiritual lineage - shall inherit the earth in its resurrected glory ... *when creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay (Rom. 8:21) and itself brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*

= that's the NEW EARTH!

THE SON & THE SOIL BOTH are promised to those who live by faith – claiming the destiny of being blessed of God to be a blessing!

IV. FAITH'S ASSURANCE – The Cutting of a Covenant

Such promises from God are so glorious that Abram needs some kind of assurance:

Verse 8 – *“O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”*

1. So God tells him to get a heifer, a goat, ram, dove and pigeon.

Abram obeys & he knows exactly what to do with these animals. He kills them and cuts them in half, placing one half of the animal adjacent to the other – and between them would run a trench into which the blood of the carcasses would drain.

(i) Abram knew what to do with these animals because back in that day this is how 2 parties would make an agreement with each other.

They didn't have lawyers draw up long, small-print documents to sign & ensure their word to each other, they'd literally CUT A COVENANT.

A. The parties involved would walk through the TRENCH OF BLOOD with the idea being, "so may it be done to me if I don't keep my word".

O. Palmer Robertson writes, *"These actions established an oath of self-malediction (= curse). If they should break the commitment involved in the covenant, they were asking that their own bodies be torn in pieces just as the animals had been divided ceremonial."*

2. So Abram sets up this covenant-making scene sometime during the day & WAITS ... and WAITS ... and WAITS.

All he does is chase away the vultures who want to pick away at these carcasses.

In fact, ABRAM NEVER WALKS THROUGH the blood.

(i) GOD DOES ... ALONE!

He pledges Himself to death to assure His promise to Abram for the Son & the Soil!

A. Abram falls into a trance. In that state he receives a vision of the future – his descendants will spend 400 years in Egypt as slaves.

They go there to grow in population. And during that time the wickedness of the Canaanites will grow such that God's need to send justice & judgment will become obvious.

(ii) God UNILATERALLY, UNCONDITIONALLY passes through the dead carcasses. His presence comes as a smoking pot and blazing torch, foretelling his presence as the cloud of glory & pillar of fire later guiding his people through the wilderness from Egypt back to Canaan.

A. Verse 18 – On that day THE LORD made a covenant with Abram.

= He pledges Himself TO DEATH – in order to assure Abram that He will keep His promise for NEW LIFE & A NEW EARTH!

= the SON & THE SOIL!

3. On the night He was betrayed, our Lord was at table with his disciples.

And He took a cup – Luke 22 – saying, *“This cup is the NEW COVENANT in MY blood, which is poured out for you. Drink from it, all of you – and as often as you do, remember Me.”*

= “I am about to die to cut the new covenant with you”, Jesus was saying.

(i) The covenant cut with Abram prefigures the ultimate cutting – God cutting Himself to death in His own Son.

Ray Stedman writes: *“The heifer is a symbol of Jesus’ strength; the goat of his nourishment; the ram of his power; the dove of his gentleness; the pigeon of his grace.”*

V. CONCLUSION

WHY WAS HE TORN APART ON THE CROSS – the center-point of all human history?

1. So that you, like Abram, will have ASSURANCE that God will keep His promises.

HE WILL GIVE YOU THE SON = a new heart

HE WILL GIVE YOU THE SOIL = a new earth

(i) WHY? So that you will live in this age according to His purposes:

“Blessed to be a blessing”

That is your destiny, Peace Church

That is your calling, Christian!

2. Do you believe that? Do you live in that calling & identity?

Do you wake up each morning wondering, “How will God’s blessing come to me today ... so that I might be a blessing?”

FAITH DOES!

Abram believed the Lord and He credited to him as righteousness.

3. When true faith lives in us, the SON LIVES IN US.

We anticipate the spiritual anointing of rebirth

= Jesus’ wisdom informing our thoughts

His holiness convicting us of sin

His will shaping ours.

(i) When true faith lives in us, THE EARTH IS OURS!

We care about this world. We care about society. We care about people.

We bring glory to God in every domain of life – family, work, play.

THE EARTH IS OUR INHERITANCE!

A. Yes the earth will be transformed into the age to come, but even today we honor & enjoy it – just as we do our bodies which also will one day be resurrected.

4. God wants you to live CONFIDENTLY in His Promises.

That’s why He PUBLICLY CUT THE COVENANT on the Cross.

Abram believed God’s promises in the SON & the SOIL – in order to live his destiny – “Blessed to be a blessing”.

WILL YOU?

AMEN!