

A God to be Trusted In

Genesis 15:1-6

Halifax: 19 April 2015

Introduction:

Today, as we continue our sermon series from the book of Genesis, we come to chapter 15.

- We are presently in the middle of the part in Genesis that tells us about Abram whose name was later changed to Abraham.
- I have been stressing to you that Abram is presented to us as an example of those who have saving faith...
 - We have seen how God came to him and promised to give him some of the very same blessings that the men at Babel had tried to obtain by self-reliance.
- The LORD promised:
 - to make him a great nation (this is the promise of a righteous kingdom)
 - to bless him (this is the promise of true happiness and holiness)
 - to make his name great (this is the promise of immortality in Christ)
 - to make him a blessing to others (this is the promise of loving, fruitful service)
 - to bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him (this is the promise of God's judgement that will destroy Satan and our enemies and that will vindicate His people).
 - to bless all the families of the earth in him (this is the promise to bring forth the Saviour of the world through his seed and bring this salvation to all the families that were scattered at Babel).

This week, more than ever, we have the emphasis that God is a God to be trusted in for these promises.

- It only makes sense—you don't have the ability to bless yourself...
 - You are in His hands—you can't even keep yourself alive.
 - You have no way to control what becomes of you—the strength is simply not in you—it is obvious...
 - And besides that, the LORD is very gracious and willing to receive those who trust in Him.
 - He is a God to be trusted in—relied upon—believed in.

Listen to our text today in Genesis 15 and you can see that...

- Listen as I read it to you—Genesis 15:

Genesis 15:1-6 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward." ² But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of

Damascus?" ³ Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" ⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." ⁵ Then He brought him outside

and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” ⁶ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

May the LORD bless His holy and infallible word to us.

TRANS> As we look at this passage, I want you to consider first of all how...

I. The LORD comes to comfort us when we are afraid.

A. There are times when we become afraid, often right after a time of great success in our service to God.

1. We can conclude that Abram was afraid after his victory over Chedorlaomer because the LORD comes to him and says, “Do not be afraid.”

a. You don’t come to people and say, “do not be afraid,” unless you think that they *are* afraid...

- Of course we can be mistaken and think someone is afraid, and they will respond and say, “I’m not afraid,”

- but here it is God who says, “do not be afraid,” and He knows all about us.

- He is never mistaken—He knew that Abram was afraid.

b. And you see that our text ties God’s coming to Abram in with what had just occurred in chapter 14 when it says “after these things...”

- That is how chapter 15 opens—with the words “after these things”

- It is after the wonderful story of faithful success in chapter 14!

- Last week in Genesis 14, we saw how Abram, in a tremendous act of faith, had rescued his nephew Lot from a coalition of four powerful kings who had taken him captive.

- Abram had heard that Lot had been taken, and, in a great act of courageous faith, he had armed his household servants and overtaken these kings in a surprise attack by night, had routed them, and had recovered Lot and all the spoils...

- And we saw how after the victory, he had given the glory to God before these pagan kings, being led by a faithful priest named Melchizedek in a service of thanksgiving,

- And we saw how Abram had refused the temptation to take some of the spoils he had recovered which were begrudgingly offered to him.

2. It is a rather strange thing, but very often when you have served God in some way—especially in an extraordinary way, you can become disheartened.

a. Do you know what I am talking about? Hasn’t that happened to you?

- Preachers often struggle on Sunday night or on Monday...

- Perhaps you have struggled after reaching out to another believer to recover them, or maybe after witnessing to an unbeliever...

- Or maybe the struggle has come after you have just made some important changes in your service to God—
 - started doing regular family worship or started consistently disciplining your children.
- b. There are many factors that can contribute to this...
- 1) For one, you can simply be exhausted—and that can make it hard to keep your focus.
 - 2) Discouragement can come from second guessing what you did—perhaps you said the wrong thing, or perhaps there were things you should have done differently...
 - 3) And then you can become further discouraged because you don't see that you have had any impact for the Lord...
 - Elijah became discouraged after his victory on Mt. Carmel because the people still did not repent...
 - This might have been a discouragement to Abram as well—none of the five kings whose spoil he had recovered seemed to have any interest in giving the glory to God...
 - 4) And this is where a kind of fear can start to creep in...
 - “Where is the LORD in all this? Has He forsaken me? Why should I go on witnessing for Him when nobody listens?”
 - Have any of you fallen into that kind of thinking?
 - “Is God really with me? Is He really going to advance His kingdom? Is there really going to be a great nation or is the kingdom of God just going to fizzle out?”
 - 5) And on top of that, you may have fear of retaliation...
 - Surely Abram did—
 - He had just done a surprise attack on one of the most powerful kingdoms in the ancient world—the kingdom of Elam—along with three other allies...
 - Would they not retaliate? What would he do then? How could he resist them when he did not have the advantage of a surprise attack by night?
 - Perhaps you look at your witnessing and you wonder if those you witnessed to are going to hate you now—at work, in the family—perhaps they will report you at work.
 - Or maybe your children will hate you because you are now correcting them—and they are not yet responding...
 - Fear can set in and it can paralyse you.
- B. But look at how our gracious LORD handles it when we fall into such times of fear after a great victory.
1. He comes to us with His gracious word at such times to comfort us!

- a. Do you see how He comes to Abram?
 - Verse 15 says “**After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision...**”
 - Isn't that so much like the LORD?
 - So often we read of Him coming to His servants when they are discouraged or afraid...
 - How often does the LORD say “Do not be afraid” to His people?
 - He came to Paul when he was under attack in Jerusalem...and told him that He would bring him to testify before Caesar...
 - He came to him again in Corinth...when he had come under attack. In Acts 18:9-10 it says:
 - **Acts 18:9-10: Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.”**
 - He came to Elijah when he was afraid and discouraged.
- b. He still does this—hasn't He done it for you?
 - 1) He doesn't come in a vision now that we have His revelation, but He very often comes through His servants...other Christians...
 - friends, ministers, spouses, elders, parents, sermons that we hear, or even through what we happen to be reading in our bibles.
 - 2) I had this very thing happen last week...
 - I was very tired on Monday after being out of town and after dealing with some hard news, and I was feeling discouraged and absolutely useless and unfruitful and overworked...
 - And I felt like there was no use in trying, but on Tuesday morning I heard a wonderful sermon on this passage in Genesis 15 in which it was like the preacher was talking directly to my issues...
 - And then after listening to that sermon I had breakfast and of all things we are in Zechariah 4 and what is in there but verses like,
 - **Zech 4:6: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.**
 - **Zech 4:9: “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.”**
 - **Zech 4:10: For who has despised the day of small things?**
 - The LORD just pelted me with encouragement from every side and soon I was ready to lift up my eyes to the Lord and move on.
 - The LORD is so kind and compassionate.
2. Look at the specific encouragement He gives here in our text.
 - a. First, He says simply “Do not be afraid.”

- It makes all the difference when it is the LORD who made the heaven and the earth who says that!
- He is the one who rules over all things and we have reason not to be afraid if **He** tells us not to be afraid...
 - And He says it again and again in His word.
- Of course we have to rightly apply the call to fear not...
 - A man who is abandoning God without repentance cannot take the words “Do not be afraid” and rightly apply them to himself.
 - Such a man ought to be terrified because he is living in rebellion against the most high God!
 - But if we are God’s servants and are seeking Him in our troubles, those words “do not be afraid” are for us as much as they were for Abram or Paul.

b. Second, the LORD says “I am your shield.”

- The Lord often is presented to us in the scripture as our shield...
 - There are so many dangers all around us—so many things to be afraid of—but with Him as our shield, there is no way that our enemies can get past Him to harm us.
- This has a special echo here in the context because after Abram had recovered Lot,
 - Melchizedek had said,
 - **Gen 14:19-20: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”**
 - The word *delivered* in the original is the same root as the word *shield*.
 - So you see, in his fears, Abram is reminded of how Melchizedek had rightly acknowledged God as the shield who had delivered Abram’s enemies into his hands,
 - And that reminds him that the Lord who had protected him then can just as well protect him now.
 - We lose sight of that when we are discouraged.

TRANS> But of course here again, we can only take comfort in the fact that God is our shield if we are reconciled to Him in Christ.

- If you are not in Christ, you are on the wrong side of the shield and you will end up being the one who is delivered up to destruction instead of delivered from destruction.
- c. And third, the LORD here says “I am your exceedingly great reward.”
- This can be translated in a different way—as *your reward shall be very great*.
 - In a way, both translations amount to the same thing...
 - If we know God, He blesses us richly—beyond all measure, and the greatest blessing we have is to know Him and to see the glory that Christ had with Him before the foundation of the world!

- In any case, the idea of receiving a reward from God ties in closely with chapter 14...
 - Remember that Abram was offered a reward for recovering the spoils and he refused because he did not want the king of Sodom to boast that he had made Abram rich.
- Abram wanted everyone to know the he was looking to God, who is the possessor of heaven and earth, for his reward and blessing...
 - And now the LORD is assuring him that He will reward him richly.
 - He is assuring him when he has become discouraged and fearful.
 - Now that Abram is discouraged and afraid, he is reminded of his own confident words, and that his reward is from the LORD.
- My brothers and sisters, do not fall into the foolish fear that there is no reward from serving God!
 - Your inheritance will be very great!
 - Live for it instead of for the treasures of this world.
 - There is no place for fear or discouragement even when you do not see God’s promises being fulfilled.

TRANS> And that is often how it is—isn’t it?

- God comes with encouragements, but they have no power to encourage you because you do not see His hand at work.

II. It is right to look for reassurance of what God has promised when life seems to contradict His promise...

- When He says He will provide for you and you can’t find a job...
- A. There are good questions and there are bad questions to ask when God does not seem to be doing what He has promised.
1. Can you think of some examples of the wrong kind of questions?
 - a. What is the first bad question in the Bible?
 - It is Satan: “Hath God said?”
 - He questioned what God had spoken in His word so as to question whether it was true!
 - You will not be fully blessed unless you eat from the tree.

- b. There are the unbelieving questions of Israel in the wilderness...
 - They said, “Has God brought us out here to die?”
 - With these words they question the goodness of God—whether His promises were sincere!
 - This amounts to an insulting blasphemy!
 - They also said, “Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?”
 - With this they questioned whether the LORD would be able to feed them all in the wilderness.
 - It would have been one thing to ask Him what they would eat or to ask Him to give them food to eat,
 - but it was quite another for them to question whether He was *able* to provide for them!
2. The question Abram asks here in Genesis 15 is a very good question.
- a. God has just told him that He would give him an exceedingly great reward...
 - and remember that back in chapter 13, verse 14-18 God had already made it clear that He would give the land of Canaan to him and to his descendants.
 - Yet, time was ticking on, and Abram’s wife was still barren, and there was no indication that he was inheriting Canaan.
 - So Abram humbly says,
 - **Gen 15:2-3: “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”**
 - He is simply trying to understand what God is going to do.
 - It was the tradition of the day to make your chief servant your heir if you had no sons—and Abram wants to know if that is what the LORD has in mind.
 - b. This is a question that grows out of his faith.
 - It is like the virgin Mary’s question when she was told she was going to have a child and she said, “How can this be since I have never had relations with a man?”
 - It is because Abram believes the promise that he asks.
 - How can he be rewarded if the promise of blessing depends on him having descendants when he had no descendants?
 - The promise is the blessing of a great nation—a godly nation!
 - Abram does not even have one son, so how is this to come about, what is he to expect?
3. This is the foundation of a prayer of faith...
- You pray best when you have a promise from God and you are pleading for its fulfillment.

- a. You look not for some random blessing, but set your heart on what God has promised—
 - and in this case it is descendants and a righteous kingdom that is blessed by God.
 - It is not just that Abram and Sarai want to have children and don't...
 - It is much more than that—
 - It is that they want what God has promised to them and what God has promised requires (or seems to require?) that they bring forth children.
 - The truth is, if you do not pray earnestly for God to work when you are being faithful to Him and you do not see His hand fulfilling His promises to you,
 - it shows a great lack of faith—not humility or a lack of commitment...
 - For example, if are refusing to work on the Lord's Day, and it is affecting your reward, you need to pray that God would give you His reward—look for Him to bless you!
- b. True faith is not what many people think it is—just positive thinking.
 - Sometimes it is self-reliance where people say, “I have faith that I will go to heaven...I believe that.”
 - But that is no good unless your faith is set on the provision that God has made for you to go to heaven.
 - You have to rely upon what God has provided—
 - And do you know what He has provided?
 - He sent His only Son to die on the cross.
 - He went to the cross to be punished for our sins.
 - And faith is not just believing that God will take you to heaven!
 - Faith is trusting in Jesus crucified according to God's promise that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.
 - c. And you see, the blessing that God had promised to Abram was a righteous kingdom that would be given to his seed...
 - And Abram did not even have a child yet...so he is basically saying to God here,
 - How can I be blessed if I do not have what you promised for my blessing—if I do not have the son of promise, what is my reward?

B. See how God very graciously responds!

 - In no way does he chide Abram for inquiring about what He has promised to him...
 - 1. He rather reiterates and clarifies the promise...telling Abram that it will be a child that comes from his own body...

- a. The LORD will clarify His promises to us all our life long as we grow in our relationship with Him...
 - As we go on in our walk with Him, we have our ups and downs, but through these He clarifies to us His wonderful gospel.
 - We see more and more clearly and fully what it means to have God's pardon in Christ, what Christ has done, how valuable it is, how great this salvation is...
 - And whenever we do not see fruit in our lives, true faith will cry out to God for it...
 - LORD, what will you give me, seeing I go childless?
 - LORD, where is your promise to me of life and blessing?
 - LORD, where is your power in my witness to others?
 - b. And you see how the LORD makes it very clear that the one who will inherit the blessing will be one who comes from his own body...
 - Look at verse 4: **And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir."**
 - God says to the questions of faith, "I will bring forth Christ through your own body. I will do what I have spoken."
2. And not only that, but He also again stresses that the kingdom He has promised to Abram (and to us) will not be sparsely populated!
- In chapter 13, He had said that they would be as the dust of the ground...
 - a. And now the LORD graciously and helpfully takes Abram out to look at the stars!
 - **Gen 15:5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."**
 - See how God helps His struggling servant to gain assurance?
 - This is helpful in two ways...
 - 1) First, because it provides a beautiful, unforgettable visual portrayal of what God will do...
 - Look up at the stars and remember what God has promised!
 - 2) Second, it is helpful because it reminds Abram that the LORD God who put the stars in the heavens is the one who will multiply his seed.
 - If God could put the stars into the heavens, it will be a very small thing for Him to give Abram a multitude of descendants.
 - b. My brothers and sisters, the next time you lose heart in the progress of the gospel,
 - go out on a clear night and look up at the stars and remember what God said!
 - God is going to fill the church with a multitude that cannot be counted!
 - He very deliberately makes the number of His true people very small at times.

- He has done that all through history...
 - But it is not because He has forgotten His promise!
- Have you lost hope in evangelism? Have you lost hope in training up godly children?
 - Look up at the stars and remember what God has promised!
 - Let God's promise refresh your heart and send you out in faith!
 - Let His promise that you do not see being fulfilled before your eyes encourage and renew your prayer—let it stir you up to pray with fervency!
 - When we, as God's people, feel small and helpless, let us remember what God has said!
 - Real faith will not just say,
 - “Well God has promised so I don't need to worry about it,”
 - It will say, “God has promised so I need to pray fervently about this.”