

The Life of Abraham: A Journey of Faith – Part 5

Faithing Our Fears – Genesis 15:1-21

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Feb. 6th, 2022

Intro:

- In your faith journey, at times you may have fears, even if you have walked with God for a while and have seen Him do incredible things and been faithful to His word time and time again in your life. We all have worries about the future, and these worries can undermine our confidence and steal our peace and joy. Being afraid for this day and for the future is a common human condition, and at times even for people of faith.
- Abram was no different than us in that regard, and from our passage for today, we will see God address and help Abram with his fears about living in this life and what will happen, and about future rewards beyond this life. In addressing Abram, God also addresses us and helps us overcome our fears, giving us confidence, peace, and joy for both now and for our eternal future.
- At this point in the story, Abram had been walking with God for some time. He stepped out in faith, following the promises of God. He made some mistakes and missteps, got back on track, and experienced God's grace and power. He saw the work of God in his life and the life of those around him. He grew in maturity and understanding and experienced personal growth, numerical growth, and supernatural victories. He just rescued his nephew and freed the people of several kingdoms. He was blessed by the king-priest of Salem.

Gen 15:1a NIV

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

- We don't know how much time had elapsed. It could have been mere days, or it could have been years. We know enough time has elapsed for Abram to think about his life and the future. And when thinking about his past, the current situation, and the life that was to come, he had some fear.
- We as finite creatures do have fear because we have only a concept of the future; we do not know the content. We can think and perhaps plan for it, but we cannot predict what will happen. So in the unknowing, we can become afraid.
- God knows us. He knows our inner thoughts as He knows everything about us, our past, our present, and our future. God spoke to Abram in a way that he could hear Him, in a vision. Speaking directly to Abram's fear, saying:

Do not be afraid

Gen 15:1b NIV

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

- I like that God did not scold Abram, get after him or put him down. God does know us and knows that we tend to be afraid. And like a good shepherd, our great God is near. God takes the

initiative to speak to us. He tells us not to be afraid and then gives us reasons we should not be afraid.

- We know what Abram was afraid of from God's communication to Abram. He was afraid of the same stuff we are afraid of. God told Adam not to be afraid. Why? Because He was his shield, which means that Abram was afraid for his life here and now. He was afraid that his enemies would overrun him, or afraid that there would be another famine, or afraid that he would not be able to take over the land that God had promised him. He was afraid of whether he would make it and how he was to make it. God said He was his "shield," which meant that Abram could trust in God to protect him and watch over him, that He would be with us and be a "shield" for him.
- God also spoke into Abram's fear and told him that He was his "very great reward." Not only was God going to take care of him while he was on earth, but also He would reward him for following and trusting in Him. God Himself was his reward, and He would reward Abram by giving to him what He promised. The reward that was promised to him would be given to him because God Himself would do so and be so.
- So our fears that drive the question, "God will you help me now, in this life," are met with "I AM your present help." And our fears and questions about the future and what is to come, the question of "God will you reward me then?" is answered by "I AM your very great reward."

You don't have to fear because God will protect you now and reward you then.

- This declaration encouraged and strengthened Abram, but he still had some questions for God, who he called the "sovereign Lord," which is good for us to remember as well. He first asked a question about the future reward, the legacy that would be his.

Trust God to reward you then

Gen 15:2-3 NIV

But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

- Abram took stock of his present situation and said that God had not given him a son, so he made a plan in his own strength and ability, to pass on what he had earned and accomplished to someone else because he did not have a child of his own. He was saying, "my reward will be based on what I produced."

Gen 15:4-5 NIV

Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

- God then spoke again to Abram, saying, nope, this man will not be your heir. You will have a son of your own flesh and blood, Abram. Not something produced from you but someone produced through you. And let me tell you something more, let's go outside. Do you see all those stars? Go ahead and count them, if you can. I cannot only count them, but I can also tell you everything about them all because I made them. You who thinks you know so much. Let me tell you what I know, and what I will do. Your offspring will be as numerous as these.
- Your reward will not be based on what you can produce, but your reward will be based on my power and my promise.

Gen 15:6 NIV

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

- This is a significant statement. It is a theologically loaded statement. Before the law was given, Abram was declared righteous not by what he did but by what he believed. No one can be declared "righteous" by observing the law because we all fail. The only way that we can be declared righteous is by believing in the word of God, which is the word that became flesh, which is Jesus, who is the Christ. We are declared "righteous" because we believe in the righteous one. And our faith is evidenced and made complete by following the righteous one in the obedience of faith.
- The apostle Paul in the book of Romans points this out when he says

Rom 4:19-22 ESV

He (Abraham) did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20 No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

- On the point that God would give him a son and make him the father of many nations, he did not waver, even though he was unclear how it would happen. He was fully convinced that God was able to do what He promised for him in the future.

Rom 4:23-25 ESV

But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

- Again this declaration was given to him, but not to him alone. It was given to all who believe in what God did through the life and resurrection of Jesus (see Galatians 3-5, Romans 3-8 for greater explanation of these things).
- Then James also reminds us that Abram's faith was completed by his actions (see James 2:18-26). Namely, in his willingness to sacrifice the son of promise, Isaac, he believed that God was able even to raise him from the dead (Heb. 11:19).

- You don't have to be afraid about your future reward because of God's power and His promise. God rewards those who seek him (Heb. 11:6), and the Spirit guarantees your future reward in Christ (Eph. 1:14).
- Abram did well with this, and then God talked to him about His promise and protection for his life now.

Trust God to help you now

Gen 15:7-8 NIV

He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

8 But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

- Abram did not have a problem believing God for his future reward. He had a hard time believing that God would help him in this life as well. Like some of us, we find it easier to trust God for salvation and reward but have difficulty trusting God for our here and now. Abram could have said, "okay, because You said it, I will believe You." But he had a hard time believing this. Even though God helped him overcome those coming against him, he still feared continued safety and protection. How can I know we will take possession of this land? There are so many other people living here!
- God again did not "roll his eyes" and say, "really?" but said okay, I will help your unbelief by making a covenant with you that you are accustomed to, and you will understand.

Gen 15:9-11 NIV

So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."

10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. 11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

- So, what is this all about? In the ancient near east, when two people made a covenant with each other, they cut a calf in half, and then declared their agreement with each other as they walked between the halves of the animal. The understanding was "may this happen to me if I break the terms of this agreement." (This is where the term "cut you a deal" comes from.) God told Abram to do this so that Abram could have further evidence that God would do what He said using a method that he could understand. Not only did God instruct Abram to cut a calf in two, but also a goat, a ram, and two birds (all of these were used as offerings to the Lord). Abram did as God instructed.

Gen 15:12-16 NIV

As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. **13** Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. **14** But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. **15** You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. **16** In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

- God put Abram into a deep sleep, and thick and dreadful darkness came. God told Abram some more details about what was going to happen, that indeed his descendant would be in the land. However, for 400 years, they would be enslaved by a nation. God will punish this nation, and they will come back to this spot with great possessions. (Remember, Moses was writing this to the Israelites after they came out of Egypt and had yet to enter into the land of promise--to remind them and encourage them about God's power, providence, and promise to them.) God's delays are not God's denials. Continue to trust Him.
- God reassured him that he would live a long life in the land and that he would be at peace and be buried in this land.

Gen 15:17-21 NIV

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— 19 the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20 Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21 Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

- Notice that God was the only one who went between the halves of the animals. God made a covenant with Abram and his decedents based upon what He was going to do, and it was not dependent on them to do it. He chose to represent Himself with a "smoking firepot" and with a "blazing torch." This was how God led the people out of slavery in Egypt, with a cloud by day and a fire by night.
- God knew all these people were currently in the land, but He would give this land to them because of His promises to them based upon His providence and power.
- You do not have to be afraid because God is your shield. He will help you now in your life on this earth. Trust Him because of His power, presence, and promise to you.

Conclusion

You don't have to fear because God will protect you now and reward you then.

- Believe Him for your future reward. Live your life in faith, built upon His promises. Everything done in the name and sake of Christ will be remembered and rewarded. Be encouraged, have hope, and continue steadfastly following the faithful and true God as we wait for all His promises to be fulfilled.

- Communion