

Genesis 15, The Beginning of Hope in the Promises of God: A Life of Abraham, Preached by Michael Gunn @ Harambee Church on February 17th, 2008

Intro

Last week we took a look at Abram's struggles. God has called him for a mission, and the mission has not been easy for Abram and his family, and it is not even clear as to what God is calling him to do. In the last chapter he has had to rescue his nephew from war lords, and last week we saw that he had an encounter with the King of Sodom and the King of Salem (Melchizedek). Abram chose to forgo any wealth gained from Sodom, and paid homage to Melchizedek, who we saw as at least a type of Christ, if not a pre-incarnate vision of Jesus.

It is here that we start our passage in chapter 15.

From the Head...

The author begins with "*After these things*," which helps us understand that the following events are removed from the events of chapter 14, and are some how related. As we continue in our study, we see God building the faith of Abram much the way He still builds faith in His called ones today. He calls us into mission with Him, that mission is often convoluted and, misunderstood as we struggle to get to know God, and He is faithful to continue to bring circumstances in our life that help us understand Him, and grow in our faith. In our passage today I believe that we see an incredible example of what it means to be in Christ. Remember Abram has paid homage to Melchizedek, which tips us off that Abram thought something about this King that was different from the earthly king Sodom, who he took nothing from. There are at least 5 key factors in this story that remind us of our walk in Christ

1. God is our Protector and Our Prize (Genesis 15:1)

He is our "*Shield*" and our "*Great reward*." God is reminding him that when we walk with God, and refuse the joy of the world, God does not forsake us. God is our prize, but the world consistently tries to dupe us into believing that real worth, happiness and joy come from the stuff of the world, and we begin to use God to get the stuff, and no longer see Him as the goal. This is idolatry clear and simple, and the issue that hamstring every human on the planet. We commit sexual sin, we become alcoholics and workaholics, we become bitter because we are trying to find our worth and significance and joy in something other than God. Simply we are enslaved by our over desires to get something that will never please. God is that reward that frees us from our slavery, so that we can be free to serve Him and enjoy Him, and worship Him.

2. God's Promise is Not Limited by Our Doubts (Genesis 15:2-5)

Abram, though growing in faith, is still trying to figure God out. There is a healthy doubt that God does entertain. There are many times in our life when things just don't make any sense, and we can, like Abram, take our requests to God, and what we begin to see is God, who loves us, answers these prayers. God reminds Abram of the calling and the promise in spite of his barrenness, but he wants Abram to know that he cannot place his worth on his ability to have children and a family (See **Isaiah 54**). The reward is not the child, the reward is Him, and He will take care of His children.

3. Faith Has Always Been the Gateway to God's Righteousness (Genesis 15:6)

There is a question here amongst the commentators regarding what this verse means, but I think Romans 4:9ff and James 2:21-23 helps us understand this more completely. Paul and James gives us a divine commentary and a wider understanding of this moment with God. Abram is saved by faith, and He is given God's righteousness by God, just like we are. His actions are a result of this change in his life, and not the reason for it. Romans 3:23-25 reminds us of this fact; that Christ's death deals with sin past, present and future. Christ's act on the cross has infinite implications. Abram's faith is simple here, not complete. He merely trusts God, and God "Reckons" (Counted it) to Abram's tab. Our righteousness is not our own, but it is a gift from God (See Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 10:1-4).

4. God is Completely Sovereign in our Missional Lives (Genesis 15:7-8)

It is true that Abram left his land. He is the one who moved, but God consistently reminds Abram that it is He that "Brought him out" of the land he was from. It is God who calls first before we respond. Here we have the ever-present mystery of salvation. We move toward God, but it is because God has moved toward us in His grace. John 6:37 tell us to come to Him, and the "*One who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out*," but John 6:44 reminds us that "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him*." God is active in our lives and pursuing those that are his no matter who they are, or where they are.

We see Abram still questioning God, but it is not unlike our uncertainty at times in trying to figure out what God is doing in our lives, and are we really his. This is why it is so important to trust the God of the covenant, and not our feelings toward

the covenant relationship. There will be plenty of times when we will doubt our place before God, but we need to trust that the sovereign God who loves us will fulfill the promises He has made.

5. God is The Faithful Covenant God (**Genesis 15:9-21**)

In answer to Abram's question God has Abram bring him certain animals to enact a covenant sacrifice. There are many issues with this sacrifice that have many theologians baffled. Why those animals? What do they represent? What kind of covenant is this? And why is a symbol of God (Smoking oven/flaming torch) passing through it? And what is this idea of falling into this sleep like trance? Many believe, and I think rightly that the animals are symbolic of Israel and its people while the "Birds of prey" represent gentile nations that would come against Israel, the covenant people. The darkness and terror represent the reality that Israel will be enslaved for 400 years, but God would deliver them, and they would return, but God was not ready to give them the land and judge those in it (Amorites represent all in the land of Canaan), because their iniquity was "*Not yet complete*" (see Leviticus 18:14-27; Deuteronomy 9:4-5; Amos 2:9). The issue here is that God is not going to unjustly remove them from the land with no cause, and replace them with another people group. God is going to give them their full time, until their sins warrant judgment in such a severe way. The alleged genocidal God is anything but that, but He is providentially involved in what happens here on earth, and does exact judgment in His own sovereign ways. War and death is never a good thing, but some times it is a needed thing in a broken world. War correspondent writes, "*The poison that is war does not free us from the ethics of responsibility... There are times when force wielded by one immoral faction must be countered by a faction that, while never moral, is perhaps less immoral.*"¹

What's amazing about this covenant is, unlike other covenants that demand something from the other party, there is only promise. And where the passing through the animal carcasses are usually reserved for those accepting the curse of the broken covenant, God passes through. He is the one promising, and guaranteeing this covenant, and He is the one who became cursed on our behalf (**Galatians 3:10-13**).

...to the Heart

How does God's sovereignty comfort you? How does it confuse you? What does it mean to have God's righteousness counted on your account? What does this say about you and your identity in Christ? What does this passage say about our missional calling before the Lord? Are we supposed to understand it completely?

I pray that we begin to think about questions like these as we continue to walk with the Lord, and endeavor to complete the mission He has given us to do.

Books for further study: *Genesis*, Walter Brueggemann, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis*, Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, Bruce Waltke, *The Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis*, Gordon J. Wenham, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, John H. Walton, *Creation and Blessing*, Allen P. Ross

Next Weeks Verses: Genesis 16

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¹ Chris Hedges, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Pg. 16