

Sermon Thoughts Abridged

GENESIS 15:1-15

WHEN THINGS WEIGH HEAVY ON YOUR HEART

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."

But Abram said, "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!"

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." 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."

And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Then He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.

Are there days when things weigh heavy on your heart, concerns that give you no peace, matters that infiltrate your days and your nights.

Abram, later named "Abraham" by God, was facing such a time in life. Likely, you know something about Abraham, the forefather of the Jewish nation. At age 75 Abraham was directed by God to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees located at the southern end of the land between the rivers,—"Mesopotamia" in Greek. It was the fertile area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, today part of Iraq. God directed Abram to take Sarai his wife, later named by God "Sarah," and his nephew Lot, to go to a new land God would show him. There Abram would become a great nation, and in His Seed—in his offspring—all the nations of the earth would be blessed, a promise that there the Savior of the world would be born from his family!

The Lord led Abram to the land of Canaan, inhabited by the Canaanite peoples. Abram, lived as a visitor in their land. The Lord prospered him, granting him great wealth and possessions. Lot also prospered. The two had to separate because both needed the same pastures for flocks and herds. Abram deferred to Lot, and Lot chose the best land. What about Abram? No problem. The Lord encouraged Abram and reassured him that ALL this land would be his someday. In fact, his Seed would be as countless as the sands of the earth.

Great things were happening for Abram, as God had promised. Yet something weighed heavily on Abram's heart. It was not that Abram was discontented with his station and position in life. God urges us to be satisfied--"Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out," (I Timothy 6:6-7). Abram was contented, but was wondering about God's own promise. No child! No descendant, no heir, to carry on the family line. How could he become a great nation without an heir? How could all nations of the earth be blessed through him, without a son? Abram was already in his late 70's / early 80's and Sarai in her late 60's / early 70's. The prospect looked dim. The Lord knew Abram's concern and burden. The Lord spoke to him in a vision to encourage him. "Fear not!"

Fears of the present are fears of the future as well. The future is out of one's own control, and that is unsettling. What are your fears? What if our situation and our times get turned completely upside down, so that you lose your home, your herd, or your ranch? In spite of all safeguards, it's not so unthinkable with the world condition and direction our own country is taking. What if you lose your health to ailment dreaded and known or new and unknown? What if you lose your mind, not functioning successfully any more, not knowing your own family? What if you lose your child or grandchild? of which we have been reminded in heartrending fashion?

What if you lose your life? All those concerns of the present are in reality concerns for the future. And the root cause of all this unrest? You know what it is. It's sin, your sin, not just everybody else's sin, your sin and the wages of sin. God's anger is in store for sinners and death awaits any time—death now and death forever.

Abram had a heavy heart. *“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!”* “Lord, what about Your promises of a great nation and One in whom all the world would be blessed with forgiveness?”

The Lord's response? *“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward . . . This one [Eliezer] shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.”* I am your shield! I, the Lord, am your protection, your defense, from all that is harmful. I keep you safe from disease, catastrophe, loss, and reversal. And when I allow it to come, I am protecting you from something worse, in the process leading you to trust Me even more. I am your exceedingly great reward—an abundantly generous gift into your coffers, a windfall--like walking down the street and finding a hundred dollar bill! I am your support group and life coach, bringing you through all the tight spots in life that are so impossible to navigate. I am your defense and your offense. Trust Me. *This one [Eliezer] shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.* I have not forgotten My promise. All things are possible, whether you think so or not. ---- The same is true for you!

The Lord was not done. *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.”* Talk about astounding assurance and encouragement! The impressive starlit skies, with thousands upon thousands of pinpoints of light. Can you count them? “I have not forgotten My promise, Abram. This is how many your offspring shall be! Think on that for a while.” You also, just think of God's great promises for you. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 40:11). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Astounding!

And he [Abram] believed in the LORD, and He [the Lord] accounted it to him for righteousness. Abram's heart was lifted up by God's encouragement and promise. He believed in the Lord. He trusted God and what God had promised, though he did not deserve a bit of it. He had faith in the Lord's promise. All of it. In his family all nations of the earth would be blessed. The Seed of the woman promised already to Adam and Eve would be his Seed and his Savior from sin and death. And the Lord credited it to Abram's account for righteousness. He credited it to Abram. To hear it in reverse, “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute [credit] iniquity” (Psalm 32:2). It is not by one's own efforts, that peace and righteousness are achieved before God. “No man can redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him” Psalm 49:7. But “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17). Abram was accounted righteous by faith and comforted abundantly.

The same is true for you. All your fears, worries, heaviness of heart, guilty conscience, are soothed in the Lord, the Savior whom God promised and sent for you!

The remainder of Genesis 15:1-15 is a most unusual account and a further encouragement for Abram. Abram longed for more assurance that Canaan would be his and that his offspring would prosper there and from them the Seed of blessing be born for all the world. Here, God had him bring a heifer, a she-goat, a ram, and two doves of different types. Abram arranged them in the manner of making covenants, agreements, back then. He cut them in half, not the birds, and laid them opposite each other. As the verses after our text say, the fire of God's presence passed through between the two rows establishing the words and promise to Abram. Abram saw with grief, and God Himself described, the oppression and suffering that his family would endure in a foreign land—we know this to be their slavery in Egypt. God also described how He would bring them out with great possessions—we know this to be the victorious “exodus” under Moses. Difficult times would come. But God's children, descended of Abram would be safe—in God's time and in God's way. Take the weight off your heart, Abram! Then God further assured him, *Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.* A victorious end!

Such peace is also yours in God's promise of the Savior. Death is simply the step from the turmoil of this life to the peace of heaven. For you are a child of Abram, not by bloodline likely, but by faith in Christ. Scripture says, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus . . . If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:26, 29). You are included! You are safe! Cast all heavy hearts aside!

So be it! Amen!

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