

## Genesis 15, Abram # 5

As you may remember, we left off last week with Genesis 14, where Abram rescued Lot from a pickle that he had gotten himself in. You perhaps remember that in the eastern kingdoms, where the grass was greener, the place where Lot had chosen, when Abram and Lot parted ways, was now in the midst of a skirmish between kingdoms. And in all of that, Lot and his family had ended up getting taken captive by the kingdom in the north. And so, Abram felt compelled to rescue his nephew from the captivity of the northern kingdom, and he was successful in bringing back all of the people and possessions that had been taken. And as you may remember, the King of Sodom, where Lot had been residing, was so thankful to Abram, that he asked that Abram would return the people that had been rescued, including Lot, but the King of Sodom offered as a reward, all of the possessions that had been recovered belonging to Sodom. And Abram said, "No, I have raised my hand to the Lord, God most High, Creator of Heaven and earth and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you, so that you will never be able to say, "I made Abram Rich.""

This is where we pick up today's passage from Genesis 15. The word of Lord came to Abram in a vision. "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward. In verse one of this chapter, God is affirming Abram's choice to not take the reward offered by the King of Sodom. God is affirming Abram's decision to accept and celebrate the blessing of the Great High priest, Melchizedek. Now that must have been a very meaningful affirmation for Abram, but Abram turns on a dime to an issue that had obviously been on his mind. So, it's kind of like, God, while I've got you here, I was wondering. You told me that my offspring would inherit this land. But I really don't understand how that is going to happen, because you have not given me any children. All of my wealth and possessions are going to end up in the hands of Eliezer, a faithful and trusted servant. But he is not my offspring.

Then the Lord came to him, and this is really neat. It is like Abram and God are having a little father – son chat. God took Abram outside and said, "Look up, and count the stars, if indeed you can count them. And then God said to Abram, "so shall be the number of your offspring." Then the scripture says that Abram believed. It says that the Lord credited it to Abram that he believed, and so he was righteous. Then God reminded Abram that, "I was the one that led you from Ur," and the reason for all of that was so that your offspring could take possession of this land. God was sort of saying, "I told you then, that your offspring would inherit the land. And I am telling you now, so you know this is a promise that you can trust."

Well, it is interesting, in the very next verse, after God proclaimed that Abram was given credit for believing, Abram says to God, "O sovereign God, how can I know that I will gain possession of this land." What assurance do I have, never mind the promise that God had just given to Abram. At this point, God must have sighed a deep sigh. But patiently he says, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old. Also bring a dove and a young pigeon." Now Abram knew exactly where God was going with all of this. The traditional way that two people made a covenant, in Abram's time, was to do exactly what God told Abram to do. The idea was that two people, who were entering a covenant, would walk between those animals that were cut in half, and state what their end of the bargain would be. The idea was that if they did not hold up their end of the covenant, then blood would be on their hands for the damages caused the other person. (I know that this seems a little weird, but I am not making this stuff up.) So, Abram did exactly what God told him to do. And then he waited. And he waited. And he waited. In fact, he had to chase buzzards away from the animals that had been sacrificed as he waited.

Then the time came when the sun set and Abram fell into a deep sleep. The Bible says that a thick and dreadful darkness came over Abram. And then the Lord came and went between the animal halves and stated his side of this covenant. The Lord said to him "know for sure that your descendants will be strangers in a country that is not their own. They will be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. Then, God says that he will punish that nation that enslaved his people, and that God's chosen people would leave their enslavement with great possessions. And he notes, that Abram will go to his fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. God then says, "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here and enter the Promised land." And he explains that that is how long it will take for the Amorite's sin to reach its full measure. So Even though God knows ahead of time, that the Amorites will never repent from their sin, they will have the full extent of time and every opportunity to turn from the dark side. And that will be when the Promised Land will be entered by the chosen people of God.

And the passage concludes that on that day, the Lord made this covenant with Abram. To your descendants I give this land from the river of Egypt, The Nile to the great river of the Euphrates. Now let's stop and take a deep breath, because I went through that all kind of fast. There are a couple of lessons here for Abram, and also, for you and for me. We have to look at Abram, and realize that there are lots of time and life experiences between his encounters with God that are mentioned in the Bible. We don't really know how much time. But from the time when Abram left Ur to the time of this covenant there is a significant amount of time, and a significant amount of experiences. Some affirm that Abram is on the path that God has laid out, and some find Abram either straying or questioning God's promise. But for the most part, Abram has followed the direction God had given him, and has honored God with his life and with his journey. He has not been perfect. But he has been faithful.

But Abram's way is hard. He doesn't have a master plan laid out for the next 20 years. God just sort of says. Do what I ask, and I will let you know. Or I will keep your posted, or you will find out when we get there. And sometimes our journey is like that, and sometimes our congregation's journey is like that, but here is what we learn from this passage. One, Abram dealt with God honestly and was forthrightly about what was on his mind. I have no children, how is that going to work, all I have is a servant. That honesty is an example that we can follow in our relationship with God. God will always listen and be patient with our questions and our doubts. But we do need to be honest with ourselves and honest with the feelings that are in ours heart. God already knows. And he is waiting for you to tell him so that he can begin to bring healing.

# 2, Abram learned that it was very important to wait. God promised this land to Abram's Offspring way back in Bethel. But Abram was still waiting. God told Abram to prepare the sacrificial animals for the covenant and he had to wait. He even had to chase the buzzards away while he waited on God. Then Abram learned that the revelation of this promise would extend over many generations of his family, And that there would be times of strife As this covenant is being fulfilled and that, in fact, the generations of Abrams offspring are still waiting for the day that all of the land between the Nile and the Euphrates belongs to God's chosen people, The nation Israel. Waiting is a lesson that we must learn in our journeys as well. God's time can extend from generations to generation of his children, and we tend to want his blessings today, or tomorrow at the latest.

The third thing that is very interesting in this passage is the covenant. It is put in terms that Abram can understand with the sacrifices and such. And then God caused Abram to fall into a deep sleep and dreadful darkness came over him. He could hear God's voice, but could not respond. God willed it so that Abram not only did not have to walk between the animals and to state his place in this covenant, but God made it so that Abram could not walk between the animals as was the worldly tradition. Abram had no obligations in this covenant. It was unconditional for him. There was no conditions that he could bring about to break this covenant.

And that helps us to see the character of this covenant in the same light as the new covenant in that name of Jesus Christ. There are no conditions that we can bring about to break our covenant in Jesus name. The cross we stand in front of here and now should remind us of both of these covenants. They both require nothing from humanity. They both reflect God's love, unconditionally for his people. And they both bring the people of God into the kingdom of God.

Let us pray