

**“Learning to Trust God's Word”
Genesis 15**

**Mililani Community Church
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A few years ago I took flying lessons at the Honolulu International Airport and obtained a pilot's license. In the process of learning to fly, I discovered something. I discovered that there are some parallels between the training every pilot needs to safely fly an airplane and the training every Christian needs to effectively live the Christian life.

Part of every pilot's training is learning to fly by the instruments. So periodically during my weeks of flight training, my instructor would intentionally induce vertigo. He would have me put my head down while he took the controls and turned the plane in several different directions. Then he would tell me to look up and take the controls. I would be dizzy and feel as though the plane was spinning in circles.

My strong tendency was to believe my feelings instead of the instruments.
I had to learn to operate against my feelings in obedience to the instruments.

It is absolutely crucial for a pilot to learn to trust the instruments or he will destroy himself, because when you are flying in bad weather with the clouds obstructing your vision, you can't trust your feelings.

Faith in God operates in the same way. The BIBLE is to the believer what the instrument panel is to the pilot. Authentic faith depends upon the Word of God, no matter how strong our feelings may be to the contrary. The basic discipline in the Christian life is to learn to believe God's Word, no matter how you feel.

Feelings are the RESULT of believing, not a BASIS for believing. Obeying the instruments, a pilot goes through adverse weather and lands safely at his destination. Believing the promises of God, a Christian is taken through difficulties of every shape and size, but he arrives safely!

We are studying the life of Abraham. Abraham was a man who lived by God's promises. His life illustrates the life of faith that every child of God is called to live.

The Bible says at the very beginning of Abraham's walk with God, he was living by God's promises. God came to him with a command to leave his country, his people, his father's household and go to a land God was going to show him. One of the most noteworthy things about those first verses of Genesis chapter 12 is the number of times God says "I will." I will show you a land. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse. I will bless all the peoples of the earth through you

God was going to do a lot with Abraham and for Abraham, and Abraham began his spiritual life by believing the promises of God.

If you are a Christian this morning, it is because you also have acted on the promises of God. Because of God's promises you believe that your sins have been forgiven. I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Because of the promises of God you believe that you possess eternal life: Jesus promised in John 11:26, *"Whoever lives and believes in me will never die."* In John 14:1-3 he said, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*

Because of the promises of God you believe that God hears and answers prayer, that he is providing for you now, and that He will also provide for you fully in the life to come. God gave you many wonderful promises in His Word for the same reason he gave promises to Abraham--so that you would learn to live by trusting His Word.

This morning we have come to Genesis chapter 15. The entire chapter deals with the Lord's confirmation of the promises he made to Abraham.

As the chapter opens, Abraham is having a problem with fear. Genesis 15:1: *"After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."*

Notice the verse begins, "After this..." which makes it clear that the promise of God relates to what has gone before in chapter 14. Chapter 14 describes a great battle. Sometime before this battle Abraham and Lot had separated and Lot had gone to live in Sodom. A time came when four kings from Mesopotamia made war on Sodom and the nearby cities. Sodom was defeated, and Lot, his family, and his possessions were captured. News of the battle came to Abraham. When he heard that Lot had been captured, Abraham set out to rescue the family: READ Gen. 14:14-16.

At this point, Abraham was in great danger. Here were four powerful kings who had destroyed large areas of land and carried off spoils from many cities. They had presumably spared Abraham only because he was so insignificant. But this nobody pursued them, attacked them by night, scattered them and recaptured all the people and possessions.

When he returned he gave and tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek, God's priest, and gave everything else back to the King of Sodom. And there he was, all alone, as he had been before, with his small entourage and his own possessions.

Common sense would say Abraham should now be afraid--He had just offended the most powerful rulers of Mesopotamia, and there was a good possibility that they would return and retaliate by launching a raid against him.

That is when God appeared to him and said, ""Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." I am with you, surrounding you Abram. Don't worry about Chederlaomer and his invading hoards, because I will protect you from danger. And I will provide for you: I myself am your very great reward. I will reward you with far more than merely material things.

Notice first that God said to Abraham *"Don't be afraid! I am your shield."*

Is God your shield? Do you trust Him? Many men and women trust other things. They trust the government, or they trust their investments, their friends, their family, their popularity, their wealth. But these things ultimately disappoint the one who trusts them. If you want a real shield, TRUST GOD! In II Samuel 22:2-3, David wrote, "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, MY SHIELD and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior--"

Charles Wesley wrote a poem expressing this truth:

A sovereign protector I have,
Unseen, yet for ever at hand;
Unchangeably faithful to save,
Almighty to rule and command.
He smiles, and my comforts abound;
His grace as the dew shall descend,
And walls of salvation surround
The soul He delights to defend.

You need to grasp this truth. Whatever you are up against, God is your shield. He is your sovereign protector, totally committed to you in the covenant of grace.

Divine protection was only half of the story of God's promise to Abraham in this verse. Secondly, God said, *"I am your shield,"* then added, *"your very great reward."*

The meaning of this phrase is found in the second half of Genesis 14. When Abram returned from the battle against the four kings he gave Melchizedek tithes of the spoils of battle. The rest he returned to the king of Sodom. In ancient times, the spoils of a battle were the warrior's reward. They were the badge of his daring and success. Abraham had every right to keep them but he forfeited them.

Perhaps he got to thinking that he made a mistake when he gave up all that booty. As he reflected on his situation and the decision he had made--wondering if he had really blown it-- God came to him and said, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am... your very great reward."

That is a great promise. God Himself was promising to be Abram's reward. What does it mean to have God as your reward? First, it means that all that God is belongs to you because He is your God. In Genesis 17:7 God makes a similar promise to Abraham by promising to be his God. READ. One of the great Puritan writers in commenting on this promise says: ". . .that is as if he said, You shall have as true an interest in all my attributes for your good, as they are mine for my own glory. . . My grace, says God, shall be yours to pardon you, and my power shall be yours to protect you, and my wisdom shall be yours to direct you, and my goodness shall be yours to relieve you, and my mercy shall be yours to supply you, and my glory shall be yours to crown you. This is a comprehensive promise, for God to be our God: it includes all." Martin Luther once said, "God is mine, and everything is mine."

Secondly, to have God as your reward means all that God has belongs to you. "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" Romans 8:32. Paul's argument here is tremendous: If God gave you His best when you were His enemy by giving you His Son, don't you think He is interested in doing His best for you now that you are His friend?

He made the universe, and rules it. He ordains all that takes place, from the careers of the greatest rulers of the earth, to the fall of a sparrow. He has promised to be faithful to you and adequate for all your needs.

But Abraham had another problem that was bugging him. God said he was going to be a great nation, and that he would have offspring as numerous as the dust of the earth. But that didn't seem to be happening. It had been 10 years since God had made those promises and Abraham and his wife were still childless.

So he laid this matter before God. READ verses 2-3. God answered him by giving Abraham another promise. READ verse 4-5. Think about what God did as he gave this promise to Abraham. First, he was repeating a promise he had already made more than once. He already said, "I'm going to make you a great nation. I'm going to give you posterity as numerous as the dust of the earth." Abraham should have said, "God said it; I believe it; that settles it." But after 10 years of waiting Abraham is puzzled and begins to doubt the promise. God does not say, "I've already told you all you need to know." No, in grace God repeats His promise.

Has God ever had to repeat a promise to you? He taught you something in the past, but then you were faced with problems that seemed to loom so large you lost sight of His promises, and began to doubt His goodness and faithfulness to you. He had to remind you through His Word that His promises were still true.

God not only repeats his promise to Abraham, he expands upon it by adding a comparison involving the stars. God took him out into the clear night air and said, "Look at those stars." "That is what your posterity is going to be like." If you ever doubt me,

just go out and look at the stars. They will remind you of how I am going to be faithful to my promise.

Abraham still didn't have a single offspring. And yet notice the beautiful response in verse 6. READ. This is the first time in the Bible that the word "believe" occurs. Abraham believed God. The ultimate question in life is whether you believe God. Not whether you believe **in** God. Many people say they believe **in** God. But the problem is they don't believe a word He says! The real question is whether you believe and live by what God has said. Can you trust Him to do what He has promised?

Another word that occurs for the first time is the word "righteousness." *"The Lord credited it to him as righteousness."* This is one of the greatest verses in the Bible, because for the first time it presents to us the doctrine of justification by faith. The doctrine of justification by faith is the most important doctrine in the Bible because it tells us how a person who has sinned against God and who is in rebellion against God may become right with Him. The doctrine of justification by faith teaches that righteousness before God is not a reward for the good works we have done. Being right with God is a gift that comes to us through faith in the work of Jesus on the cross.

This verse is quoted three times in the NT. In Romans 4 Paul writes, *"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God. What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. . . .(v. 23) The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for Abraham alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead."*

This verse (15:6) must be true of each one of us as well. The only way we get righteousness is by faith--when we receive Jesus Christ as personal savior.

CONCLUSION: Can you put your name in Genesis 15:6? Can you say with full assurance that you know beyond any shadow of a doubt that you are righteous before God and fit for His holy presence? If you were to stand before God and He were to ask you, "Why should I let you into my Heaven?" What would you say? If you say, well, I've done the best I can, I've tried to keep the 10 commandments, I've gone to church. I believe in God—None of those things will make you fit for heaven. You must turn from your own efforts to save yourself or cleanse yourself and trust totally in the work of Jesus on the cross. He died to pay the penalty for your sins. You must put your faith in Him as the one who fully paid the debt of your sin. Trust in Christ today and begin the adventure of learning to trust Him for every detail of your life.