

Genesis 15:1-6

¹After these events the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. He said, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”
² Abram said, “LORD God what can you give me, since I remain childless, and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?”
³ Abram also said, “Look, you have given me no offspring, so a servant born in my house will be my heir.”
⁴ Just then, the word of the LORD came to him. God said, “This man will not be your heir, but instead one who will come out of your own body will be your heir.”
⁵ The LORD then brought him outside and said, “Now look toward the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” He said to Abram, “This is what your descendants will be like.”
⁶ Abram believed in the LORD, and the LORD credited it to him as righteousness.

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Theme: Confront Fear with Faith Pentecost 12, August 23, 2020

Intro: They were driving in separate cars. The sister, with her baby in the car seat, were in the car ahead of her brother driving the second car. Suddenly the brakes go out on the sister’s car. She, the car and her baby roll and tumble down a 100 foot embankment. When the car finally came to rest, it was a mashed, mangled mess and it was upside down when brother Blake found it. His sister had been ejected from the vehicle, but miraculously was OK. Blake now turned his attention to his 11 month old niece who was trapped in the overturned vehicle.

He was afraid of what he would find, but knowing he might be the only hope his niece would have he prayed, “Lord Jesus, help me.” Using the light on his cell phone he found his niece, still in her car seat. The space was tight because the car was so badly crumpled, but he was able to work his niece free and carefully ease her out of the seat through the tangled mess and out to safety. Amazingly, mother and baby suffered only minor bruises and scrapes.

But I would call your attention to is Blake’s prayer. Lord Jesus, help me! Was that a prayer of faith? It could hardly be anything less. He was surely as afraid as anyone could be. He did not know what he would find. But he also knew he could not count on his own strength. He did not want to be called a hero. And with good reason. God is the one who gives strength, when and where he wills.

That was a lesson that Abraham also needed to learn. He too, was confronted with a fearful situation—not a fear that put to the test his physical

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endurance or strength, but a fear that God would not keep his promises to send a Savior. And as we read these words we already know the outcome so we may wonder why Abraham had such fears. But put yourself, sinful nature and all, in Abraham's place. Wouldn't you be afraid if God said you would have a child, but now you are nearly 90 years old and it is obvious that people of that age don't usually have children? Was God going to be like so many human beings and back out of his promise and say, "Abraham, I'm sorry, I guess I waited too long. I can't keep my promise"?

But that isn't what we find is it? We find that God is always faithful to his promises, and he backs them up so we can grasp what he wants us to believe. The Lesson Abraham would learn, by God's grace, and which we also need to learn is to confront fear with faith.

1. When faced with fears we often run

A. While Abraham did not run away from God, he ran toward the obvious as a reason why God would not keep his promises. In effect he WAS running away from God's promises.

1. But Abraham failed to consider the obvious. Had not God just given him an impossible victory over a great army?
2. Some time before chapter 15 we hear of four powerful kings from the north who swept down and took the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah captive. Now remember that Abram's nephew Lot was among those people. When Abram heard of the capture of the cities he did not sit still. He gathered his own men, took the four kings by surprise at night and routed them. On the return trip home, a grateful King of Sodom offered Abram all the spoils of battle, including the riches of Sodom, but Abraham refused. He knew that God was his true treasure. He wanted God to receive all the credit for his wealth, not a human being.
3. So, you see, God was teaching Abraham by degrees. He had promised that all the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants. So he launched out in faith. He believed God would give him the ability to defeat the kings from the north no matter how overwhelming the odds seemed to be.

4. The Lord was teaching Abram to believe the promise about the land. The land where Abraham lived would belong to his descendants. Yet with the Canaanites living there that must have seemed impossible to Abraham...until God gave him the great military victory over a huge army that had taken the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah captive.

B. While looking at the outward obstacle, he failed to understand God's power to overcome every obstacle.

1. What did Abraham see as the obstacle? His age and Sarah's age. God promised a son. How would he give them a son when they were as old as some people's grandparents?
2. Isn't that the question we sometimes ask? How can God keep his promises when it is so obvious that he can't? But do we dare to believe that God can't keep his promises?
3. We ask, how can God help me pay my bills? How can God reverse this disease? How can God take away my pain? How will God ever take control of this pandemic? And you can insert your own question. We think the outward evidence says God will not keep his promises to be with us, to strengthen and uphold us with his righteous right hand. How dare we throw outward, physical evidence in God's face as PROOF that he can't keep his promises? Yes, when we face fear, how often we run away from God, only to turn back and display the evidence that God can't keep his promises because the obstacles are too great. How much we are like those Israelites of old who saw his power to bring Pharaoh to his knees but doubted he could help them at the Red Sea. And after they saw how he delivered them at the Red Sea they still doubted that he could supply them with water and food.

C. Abraham was a lot like us. He allowed outward circumstances to dictate truth instead of looking at God's Word and promises as truth.

1. What did Abraham see? He saw no children in his future. He saw that his family line would die out. He saw God's promise of a Savior falling to the ground because God had not given him any children.

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2. But our sinful nature often gets distracted, like the magician who tries to create an illusion with smoke and mirrors to distract the audience into thinking that he is making something disappear or appear when it hasn't really happened.
3. That is what our sinful nature likes to do. We get distracted by what we THINK WE SEE rather than focusing on God's truth.

Application: What will help us focus on God's truth? Be very forthright with yourself. Acknowledge that YOU have a sinful nature and that it will not believe God's promises. It will find every excuse in the book to tell God he is wrong. THEN go feed your faith with God's Word. Feed your faith on the greatest promise ever made, and the greatest promise ever kept—When the time had fully come God sent his Son born of a woman, born under law so that we who have also been born under the law would receive God's adoption papers and be fully restored to his family.

When you are feeling weak in your faith remember what Paul says, **That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.** God's strength and power are available to us when we finally admit our own weakness and allow God to use his power to keep his promises.

2. But God urges us to confront our fears with faith in his promises

A. Notice that God directly contradicted the doubts Abraham expressed.

1. Abraham said, "**You have given me no children; so a servant born in my house will be my heir.**" **Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but instead one who will come out of your own body will be your heir."**
2. The Word of the LORD came to Abraham. You see, this was not man's thought, man's misgivings, man's doubts. Abraham had expressed his doubts and misgivings. But they were wrong. God said, "This is the truth: You will have a son who will be a personal, direct descendant from you."

3. While doubts are wrong and display a lack of faith in God, we need to get them into the open and let God's Word speak to them. When God's Word speaks to our doubts, his truth dispels our doubts, so that the only thing we can say is, "God, you were right, I am wrong."
4. And then our God will do for us as he did for Abraham.

B. God's promises bid us to believe what God says.

1. When God makes a promise, the Holy Spirit convinces us that it comes from the mouth of the almighty God; he causes us to believe what God says and his word strengthens our faith.
2. Abraham believed God and he credited it to him as righteousness. The promise of the Savior, upon which every other promise of God hung, that promise would not be fulfilled for 2000 years. But that did not matter to God; nor did it matter to Abraham who put his faith in that promise. What matters is that God makes THE promise. And when he makes a promise, there is only one thing for us to do—believe it.

Application: You see, when we put our trust in any of God's promises, we are doing what Abraham did. We are saying AMEN to God's word. We are saying, I believe, not only God's promise to protect me from harm and evil; I believe not only God's promise to help me raise my children, I believe his promises also to forgive my sins, I believe his promises to help me face my fears and bring them to his throne of grace; I believe his promise to hear and answer my prayer to help me when my doubts assail me and try to convince me that God can't possibly keep his promise; AND because of God's promise that he made us his children at our baptism and that he keeps us as his children through that same promise, I can and will believe that God gives me strength to face my fears with faith in his promises. Think of the fears of Christ's disciples, especially the two on the way to Emmaus, or the women who came to the grave expecting to embalm Christ's body. When they saw the resurrected Jesus, all their fears were gone. The same kept promise of a risen Christ takes away every fear we might have. Because if there is anything scripture proves to us, it is that our fears are always wrong and God's Word is always right. Amen.