

Genesis 15

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[0 : 00] And do open up your Bibles again to Genesis chapter 15. Genesis chapter 15, it's on page 10 of the church Bibles. This chapter today is all about God addressing our fears. Do you see that?

Abraham, don't be afraid. There's lots going on in this chapter. As we read it, you would have seen that. Dead animals, a ceremony, nations, land offspring.

There's lots going on. And as we will see, this is an incredibly important chapter in the Bible. But at the heart of this, there is something wonderfully simple and comforting going on here.

God is addressing and calming our fears in this life. The fears you have about the future.

The fears of what will become of my life. The fears we have about our faith. The doubts we have.

The assurance we struggle with. The fears of the sin and guilt that we wrestle with.

[1 : 21] God is addressing all those fears. And in particular, God is addressing those fears that we have when we think God won't and can't fulfill his promises in my life.

God has said, God has said, this land of Canaan will be yours.

And you're going to have a son. And through that son, your offspring will fill this land. And my blessing will be with you. I will be with you. And I will restore this cursed world through your offspring.

It is the grand promise of a new world. But right now, that future is looking very unlikely. It's been about 10 years since God made that promise back in chapter 12.

Probably about the same amount of time since I last preached that chapter. Abraham is about 80 years old here in this chapter. His wife Sarai is in her 70s. And yet they have no children.

[2 : 41] Yet the promise is of a child. And on top of that, the land is far from theirs either. Abraham is just one man among many nations.

He's small fry on the world stage. And in fact, he's just been at war with far off nations coming to invade. And if you remember, yes, he beat them.

But the threat still lingers. He's in a dangerous world. And so after all this time, there is fear that maybe God won't and can't achieve his promises and plans in Abraham's life.

God's promise seems to be fading away. And the blessing seems to be slipping through Abraham's fingers. And so the future just seems very uncertain and very scary and bleak.

And it's just how we can feel. God has promised us so much to work all things for my good.

[3 : 50] But I look to the future and I don't see how what God is doing in my life can be for my good. And so we doubt and we fear.

God has promised to transform me from one degree of glory to another. But the state of my heart and the struggles that I'm facing, it is all far from glorious.

And so we doubt and we fear. Or maybe you're here tonight and you're looking into the Christian faith. And you wonder, you have all these questions and you wonder how all this can be true.

How can I know this world is going to be fixed by God? How can I know he's the one to deal with my sins? How can I know any of this is true?

And you are filled with doubts. Well, whatever fears we face, God is addressing them here tonight. And he wants to calm them.

[4 : 54] And to do that, God says, look. Look. Take your eyes off yourself. Take your eyes off those things that overwhelm you right now.

And just look at three things tonight. Look at God. Look at God's promises. And look at God's blood. And those are the three things I want us to look at tonight.

And the first thing is this. Look at God. Look at God. With these fears and doubts in Abraham's heart, it's interesting. He doesn't even need to state them to God, does he, at the beginning of this chapter?

God just jumps in already knowing what's on his heart. God knows all the emotions and thoughts that we have even before we can say them. And what does he say, verse 1?

Fear not, Abraham. I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great. Well, actually, if you just look closely at that verse, the second half of that verse, it's even better than it sounds.

[6 : 02] It's better understood as, I am your very great reward. God is saying, who exactly he is to Abraham? Fear not, Abraham. I am your shield.

I am your very great reward. Just notice that the first thing God says to address his fears, it isn't positive thinking.

It isn't mindful breathing. It isn't goal setting. The first and foremost thing to settle a fearful heart is to look at who God is. God says, look at me.

Look at who I am. Real comfort, it's only found in who God is. I have been ordained about a year now as a Christian minister.

And I'm slowly learning more and more about how to do that well, including how to counsel people in their needs. I've been learning a lot from Paul and Ruben and the elders here.

[7 : 02] One important thing that ministers need to know about the human heart is whenever we look in on ourselves and on our problems, that always makes everything worse.

When we are struggling with guilt and we are struggling with guilt and we just fixate on that sin. And we keep looking in on our own hearts.

And it's just like looking into a black hole, isn't it? And it just pulls you further down into the darkness. It's the same with fears and doubts. We can turn in on ourselves and fixate on those problems in our lives.

And instead of helping, we just worry more, fear more, and it consumes us. And so what needs to happen when we are overcome with guilt or doubt or fear, we need to look outside of ourselves.

And not just anywhere, we need to look at God. Which is exactly why God's opening words are this, Fear not, Abraham. Look at me, I am your shield.

[8 : 10] I am your very great reward. And this is what God wants you to do today. Just stop. Take your eyes off yourself and off whatever is going on right now.

And look at your God and realize who he is. And for those in Christ, who is your God? Well, just like Abraham, God says, I am your shield.

And what does a shield do? A shield defends you. A shield protects you. A shield keeps the harm away and keeps you safe. Think of a Spartan shield wall.

That's what always comes to my mind. A Spartan shield wall. You fire loads of arrows at them. Nothing hits them. Well, that is God over your life right now.

You may fear what lies ahead. You may wonder what God is doing with your life. And we are, we're so prone to doubt God's character and intentions, aren't we? And so we need to look out once again and realize who our God is.

[9 : 20] And God says, I am your shield. The one who has your shield. The one who has your life in his hands. He is your shield. The one who is for you and defending you.

And not only that, but what else does God say? I am your very great reward. He's saying, I am your rewarder.

I'm the one filled with blessing and goodness. And I'm the one who pours it all out on you. As Abraham fears an empty future, God simply reminds him, I'm not a stingy God.

I'm not a God who loves holding out on you and making your life worse. No, I am your very great reward. And we can so easily forget that, can't we?

We can forget how generous and kind God is and has been to us. And when it looks like God's promises aren't appearing or life isn't going smoothly, we do start to think he's a stingy God.

[10 : 31] But before anything else, God says, look out and look at him and just remember. The God who has your life in his hands, he is so generous.

He is your very great reward. But God doesn't end there. He wants us to keep looking out. And look at something particular about God.

As we see with Abraham, when fear and doubt overwhelm us, we need to look at God's promises. That's the second thing to look at today. Look at God's promises.

In verse 2, Abraham now articulates his fears. And it's about a big missing piece to God's promise of salvation. In verse 2, Abraham said, This is the promise God gave back in chapter 12.

I will bless the world, reverse the curse. And it's going to come through your offspring, through your son. And from that son will come a whole nation of offspring.

[11:50] And all the blessing to this world. But there's no son. Let alone a whole nation. And the closest is likely the chief servant in his house.

Eliezer, not even family. And how does God respond to this fear? He simply repeats the promise. Verse 5. And he brought him outside and said, Look towards heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them.

Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. If you have ever been stargazing before, You have to get out of London to do it. And you can't see a single star in the sky.

But if you do get out of London, It is remarkable how many stars are up there. Isn't it? Just try counting them. You simply cannot. And next time you do see those stars, You should realize, Those are the same stars Abraham looked at.

And God says, His offspring, That those who will be blessed by God, Those are part of this blessing and salvation. That those people are going to be as vast as those stars.

[13:07] It's as if God is saying, Look at those stars. I made those stars. All of them. I put them in the heavens. And so do you not think, Abraham, Do you not think I can put an offspring in your life?

Well, this may sound a bit twee. But I made those sons. Do you not think I can make you a son? When Abraham fears, When he fears about God achieving his purposes, And it seems impossible, God simply reminds him of the promise.

Abraham, I know you can't see it yet. And I know you don't understand the timing of all this. And I know you don't see how this can even happen. But just hear my word, It will happen.

An offspring yet to come, A world yet to come, But it is coming. And so simply hear what I'm saying, And trust that I am your shield, And your very great reward.

And how does Abraham respond to it? Does he say, Well, yeah, Lord, You've already said that. I know that. No, no, no. I'm looking for more. No, what does Abraham do?

[14:28] He trusts him. Verse 6. And he believed the Lord, And he counted it to him as righteousness. God's word was enough.

God said it. He said it again. And it was enough. And the word believe here, Is the same word as trust, Or having faith.

Believing God, The use of belief and trust and faith in the Bible, Believing God, Isn't this vague thought that he exists? No, it is knowing who he is, And hearing the promises he has made, And trusting and relying on him, To make it happen.

And notice what that meant for Abraham. God counted it to him as righteousness. This is the language of being made right with God. So think of it like this.

If our lives are like spiritual bank accounts before God, As sinners, Our spiritual bank account is naturally empty before God.

[15:38] In fact, it's worse than that. It's in debt before God. We're not right with God. If you're in Club 16, Club 16 folk, You here, you listening, That's what we've been learning in Romans 3, In our memory verse, isn't it?

But here, Here we see how we are made right with God. And it's not by working hard. It's not by sorting my life out and being good.

It's not by any merit or achievement Or anything that I've done in my life. No, no, you could do that all you like For the rest of your life, And your bank account will stay empty.

No, it is only through believing God. Who he is and his promises, Believing God, That is how God counts righteousness to your name.

And not that you have to have a lot of faith, Like super faith, And then God looks at that super faith and thinks, Oh yeah, that's good enough. Then he thinks you're righteous.

[16:44] No, it is not that. Faith is like the pipe Through which all of Christ's righteousness Comes to us and gets put to our name.

So your bank account always says righteous. And so if you are here tonight, And you are worried, Maybe you fear About how you can be made right with God.

You think about all that has been, That has gone on in your life. All that you have done and thought and said, And you fear, you wonder, How you can even be forgiven.

How you can actually be accepted by God. Well, it is thankfully nothing, Nothing about what you can do. It is not about making it up to him, Or paying a price, Or groveling.

No, God says simply, Trust in him. Trust his word and his promises. And through that faith, You are made right with God forever.

[17 : 54] Just like Abraham here. It is the same faith. And for Abraham, This isn't just a one-off. No. This is Abraham heading into the future, Constantly relying on God.

As we face many doubts and fears, And we can question what God is doing in our life, This is how God wants us to keep on living. Look to God's promises.

He has promised to work all things for your good. He has promised to provide for your every need. He has promised to bring you to glory, And to be your heavenly father, Protecting you every step of the way.

And like Abraham, We may wonder, Where is the good in this? Where are the promises? Where is God's care for me in all of this? And in those moments, God says, Trust him.

Trust in his promises. Look at his promises, And trust in God. You may not see it, But God is there.

[19 : 08] He is your shield, And he's with you every moment. And like Abraham, There is a world coming, That we cannot see.

A world filled with, The children of God. Like the stars in heaven, More than we can even count. And God says, Rely on him, To bring you there.

You aren't made right with him, By anything in your own strength. And so, You don't need to face the future, In your own strength. No. This is how you begin, And end your journey.

You rely on God, For everything. And we can be, Even more sure of this. Because, He has guaranteed, All of this.

All the promises for your life. He has guaranteed it, With his own blood. And this is the final thing, To look at today. Look at God's blood.

[20 : 12] Look at God's blood. So Abraham, Trust God in this moment. And trust him going forward. But at the same time, He's struggling with assurance, Here in this chapter.

It's the experience of every believer. We all go through this. And so, He asks God, Verse 8, Oh Lord God, How am I to know all this?

I look at who you are, I look at your promises, But how am I to know, That you have planned, All that you have planned for this world, Is going to happen?

What if my faith fails? What if my sin, Is just too much, To bring me to glory? Lord, What if I stumble, And I fail in my walk with you?

It's fear again. And what happens next, It may seem a bit strange, Maybe when we read this, It just sounded strange, It sure is.

[21 : 16] God answers those fears, By performing a ceremony. But I want us to see, That this ceremony in front of us, This is a huge moment in the Bible.

It is a huge moment, For every believer throughout history. This ceremony here, This is God guaranteeing, To you, And to me, That his promises for this world, And for your life, Are 100% absolutely going to come true.

And so, Let's just see what happens. First, God gets Abraham to bring animals. Do you see that verse 9? A heifer, It's like a cow, A heifer, A goat, A ram, A turtle dove, And a pigeon.

And verse 10, He cuts them in half. And he lays these animals, On the ground, With a walkway, Between each half.

Right, So imagine the walkway there, That little aisle there, Right, So imagine, You've got half a goat there, Barnabas is the top half of a goat, Paul Felix, He's the bottom half of the goat, Right, So imagine all these animals, Split in half, Down that aisle, Right, And this was a common way, In those days, Of making a covenant.

[22 : 43] Do you see that word in verse 18? Verse 18? A covenant, It's basically a contract, And as with every contract, There are promises, Rewards, There are conditions, And there are also curses, If you break this contract, So think of a phone contract, Right, Vodafone promises, Something to you, In a contract, Right, They promise you, Unlimited texts and minutes, Right, On the condition, That you pay 15 pound a month, Right, And if you don't pay that, You lose your contract, Or if you cheat Vodafone somehow, You could face a fine, Or legal action, You could face a curse, Well that's the covenant contract, Being made here, Between God and Abraham, God is promising this land, And this offspring, And this restored world, All these blessings,

That's what's at stake here, Not unlimited text, Unlimited life, Right, Eternal life, And in those days, What would happen, In order to sign the contract, You don't use a pen and ink, In those days, The

two parties, Would walk between, The dead animals, Down that walkway, Right, And that was as a way of saying, I promise to uphold, The end of my covenant, And if I don't, This is what will happen to me, Right, Look at these animals, This is what will happen to me, I will get cut in two, And so as they walk down that aisle, They are saying, I am putting my life down, Saying, I will die, To make this covenant happen, And so, The two parties would sign it, By walking down that aisle, But look what happens here, Verse 12, God puts Abraham,

In a deep sleep, He's completely passive, In all that happens next, And then verse 17, When the sun had gone down, And it was dark, Behold, A smoking fire pot, And a flaming torch, Passed between these pieces, Abraham, Doesn't sign the contract, Abraham, Doesn't pass between the animals, No, Do you see, Only a fire pot, And a flaming torch, Now this is significant, What does, Fire, And smoke, Remind you of in the Bible, Okay, Think of the burning bush, Think of the exodus, And that pillar of cloud, And fire, Think of Sinai, On the mountain, Fire, And smoke, What is it, It's God's presence, This is God,

God, Passing through the animals, While Abraham, Just watches on, And so, What is God saying here, Abraham asks, How will I know, That these promises, Will come true, How will I know, This covenant, Will actually happen, In my life, And these blessings, Are going to happen, And these promises, Are going to happen, How will I know, Well as God, Passes through those dead animals, God says, I guarantee this, With my own blood, If you sin, Abraham, If you fail, If you break this covenant, I will take, All the curses, Upon myself, And I will die, To make this covenant happen, This is God, Signing the contract, With his own blood, Which gives us, A deeper understanding, Of what is happening, On the cross,

After God, Passed through those animals, Millennia later, He completed, That contract, On a cross, Outside Jerusalem, That was God, Fulfilling the covenant, For us, That was Jesus, Taking the curse, Of all our covenant breaking, And that was Jesus, The divine son of God, Shedding his blood, Being torn, Like these animals, In order to guarantee, God's promises, Will happen, As we celebrate, The Lord's supper, In a moment, We are going to be reminded, Of the words Jesus said, As he held that cup, Do you remember?

[27 : 38] He said, This is my blood, Of the covenant, This is what, I have guaranteed, Your future with, Here at this table, Jesus says to us, Your future is, Completely secure with him, Look at God's blood, Right here, This is why, Whatever you face, In the future, This is why, You don't need to fear, It's here at this table, That God says, I am your shield, And your reward, And God is pressing, Into us, If he did not spare, His own son, How will he not give you, All things, How will he not, Fulfill all his promises, He has made for you, And so, What has happened, In this ceremony, In this chapter, Is absolutely, Monumental, This is the,

Unbreakable guarantee, Of where this world, Is heading, In his death and resurrection, In his death and resurrection, The Lord Jesus, Has guaranteed, With his own blood, That when you trust, And rely on him, He will absolutely, 100% forgive your sins, He will, Without doubt, Bring you to glory, He will, Restore this world, And undo the curse, And bring his people, A people as vast, As the stars in the sky, He will, Bring us, Into that new world, And he guarantees, To be us, Be with us, Every step of the way, And just like Abraham, It may not look like it now, You may not see, How God is bringing you there, You may not see, How his timing, And his ways in your life,

Right now, How these are, How that's fulfilling, His promises, But he has promised it, And Christ has shed his blood, To guarantee that, And so whatever doubt, Or fears, That you may have right now, Look to God, And look to his promises, And look to his blood, That is the guarantee, God will achieve, All that he has promised for you, He is your shield, He is your very great reward, Let's pray,