

THE GOD WHO PROMISES

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM
GENESIS 12-22

God's Covenant - Genesis 15

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Leaders, please use these questions as a guide for discussion. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)

Connect: What would it look like to make one shift, in one area of your life, that would help express or enable your dependence on God?

Warm-Up

1. What's something in life that feels uncertain right now?

Read Genesis 15:1-6

2. What are the three things God says to Abram in verse 1? Why do you think Abram needed to hear them?
3. Why do you think Abram responds with frustration and questions instead of immediate confidence?
4. How does Abram's honesty with God challenge or encourage you in your own prayer life?
5. What fears or doubts do Christians commonly wrestle with today?
6. Why would God's promise of descendants seem impossible from Abram's perspective?
7. In verses 4-5, how does God reassure Abram? Have you ever had a moment where creation (stars, ocean, mountains, etc.) reminded you of God's greatness or promises?
8. Verse 6 says Abram "believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness." What does this teach us about how someone is made right with God?
9. Why is it important that Abram was counted righteous by faith rather than by his performance?
10. Read Romans 4:2-5. How does Paul use Abram's story to explain the gospel?
11. Why do you think Christians sometimes struggle to feel saved or assured of God's love?
12. How does the gospel give assurance even when our feelings fluctuate?

Read Genesis 15:7-21

13. Why is it significant that only God passes through the pieces and not Abram?
14. What does this covenant teach us about God's faithfulness compared to human faithfulness?
15. Michael laid out some examples of this from the Old Testament. Can you think of any more specific examples?
16. How is it encouraging to know that God not only promises but that his actions throughout history match up to his promises?
17. How does Jesus ultimately fulfill and secure God's covenant promises?
18. What would it look like this week to more fully entrust yourself to God?

Apply: How can the assurance of God's salvation encourage you this week?

PRAY: Heavenly Father, thank you that you are totally faithful to your promises even when we fail. Help us to deepen our trust and faith, grow in our assurance, and grow in our delight in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TITLE: The Covenant Promises

PASSAGE: Genesis 15:10-21

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: We can know for certain that God is faithful and so we can entrust ourselves to him

AIM: For people to have assurance in the promises of God

STRUCTURE:

- 1-6 - Do not Fear
- 7-21 - Know for Sure

- You know the old saying I'm sure - the only certain things in life are death and taxes.
- Whoever coined that phrase really should have got some copyright or trademark on it to get some royalties for it whenever it is used...but of course, all those royalties would be taxed.
- But this is the world that we live in. An uncertain and an unsure world.
- Studies have shown that our mental health as a nation and anxieties are back to what they were 6 years ago in the midst of the pandemic.
- With interest rates on the rise again, cost of living increasing, war not ending - we can be left to despair at the state of the world.
- If we look to the things of this world for help and comfort, we will be left in a state of unease.
- As Christians, we can wonder what God is up to in the world and what God is doing with us.
- More personally - as we examine our lives and state of our hearts and the state of our relationship with God, we might also wonder, does God really want us? Has God really saved us?
- Well - today as we look at our next chapter in Genesis, we see Abram wondering similar things!
- He's wondering what God is doing with him! He's had these amazing promises that have sounded nice, but are seemingly on the backburner...an so uncertainty creeps in for him.
- But we'll see that God gives him total assurance, and we can have total assurance in his promises.
- We can have total comfort in the eternal promises of our God.
- Because our salvation and our relationship with God isn't dependent on our performance, or on how we feel - it's totally dependent on what God has done for us and what God has promised us.

- **Do Not Fear**
- Now here's the context - remember that Abram in chapter 12 has been promised 3 main promises of a land, of becoming a great nation, and of being a blessing to the whole world.
- And there have been a couple of times of renewal of these promises since then...but he is currently in the land, but camping - not yet making it his land. And what's even more is that Sarai and Abram still didn't have any children.
- Right before chapter 12, we were told that Sarai was barren, she was probably around 65 or so...and she's even older by now (we don't know how much time has passed)
- And so this fact begins to have a foothold in Abram's brain.
- It's been simmering away, but now it comes to the front of mind for Abram.
- V1 "After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"
- God comes and speaks to Abram in a vision to tell him 3 things:
 - Do not fear, I am your shield, and your reward will be very great.
 - Now Abram has already known of the God being his shield. Last week, we saw Abram winning the victory against the other kings who took his nephew Lot.
 - And after the victory - Melchizedek said that God had delivered his enemies into Abram's hand.
 - Or more literally - God had unshielded Abram's enemies.
 - It's the same Hebrew word here.

- God is his shield, his protector, his deliverer, his saviour.
- But the next promise of a reward rings a bit hollow for Abram.
- Because so far - he is still childless. There's no one to inherit the reward!
 - Apart from Eliezer.
 - There was a practise in these days of childless couples almost adopting or appointing one of their servants as a son, to bury them and to keep things in order after they die. It seems that Abram and Sarai have done that to Eliezer!
- And then he ramps up the language again in V3:
 - "And Abram said, "Behold, **you have given me no** offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."
- This is quite bold of Abram isn't it? Here he is blaming God!
 - "God you have promised me descendants who will inherit the land - but Sarai and I are old and you haven't given us a son, let alone a lot of sons and daughters to begin a nation!? What are you doing here God?"
- This is quite a human reaction isn't it? I'm sure we all have moments like this..
 - Crying out to God when disaster strikes home...
 - Crying out to God when your children don't follow him even after years of praying...
 - God what are you doing!
 - Or as an unnamed father in the Gospel of Mark cries out to Jesus "Lord I believe, Help my unbelief!"
 - Just as a side note - isn't it kind and gracious of God that we can cry out to him with these types of questions and doubts?
 - That we don't have to hide them away or bury these feelings, but can bring them to him?
- But let's keep on going in the narrative:
 - V4 "And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."
- God comes, he speaks, he reassures Abram.
 - *I remember going away with Rach one time to a farm-stay out near Warwick. It was completely out in the sticks, about 15 min out of Warwick, and there were no city lights.*
 - *And when nighttime came, we went and lay down out the front and looked up - and what we saw took our breath away.*
 - *Stars upon star upon star upon star, galaxies - all as far as the eye can see.*
 - *Have you had this experience lately?*
 - *In fact, one of the sadnesses of living here in the city, is that I can't really remember the last time I saw this type of night-sky because of all the light!*
- And in Abram's day, there was certainly no light pollution, so he would have seen the same night-sky with an uncountable number of stars...
- And God tells him - go outside...look up...you are going to have this many descendants.
- Abram - I know you don't have a child yet, I know that you and Sarai are getting on in years, I know that you have questions - but this is what's going to happen!
- And V6 "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."
- Despite all that was against him - Abram believed God.
- It's not that he didn't believe before and is now believing, but it's now that Abram was fully convinced. He was certainly assured. He already trusted, and now he fully entrusts himself to the Lord...And God regarded Abram as Righteous. Or right with him.
- Because Abram believed in the Word of the Lord, trusted himself to God - God made him right with him. He gave Abram a clean slate, and cleared his sin.
 - All that stuff with lying in Egypt, and sort of selling his wife, and that distrust and disregard of God - forgiven by God.

- All the other stuff that Abram will do and stuff that isn't written down in Genesis - forgiven by God.
- Notice - Abram wasn't required to do anything to earn his righteousness, he wasn't told to do any ritual or sacrifice, all he did was take God at his word and believe it!
- This was a complete grace of God!
- Because the way that Abram could be counted righteous is through the same way that we can be counted righteous....through Jesus!
- In fact Paul picks this up in his letter to the Romans - in the middle of arguing that righteousness and forgiveness comes through trusting in God (that is- through faith) and not through works,
- He writes in Rom 4:2-3 quoting Genesis: "If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."
- Being right with God some simply through faith. Through handing our lives over to God and trusting him and his word!
- Through remembering God's sure and certain promises and trusting them!
- And we will be saved.
- We aren't saved through our performance, we aren't saved by the quantity of our faith, but by who we put our faith in.
- Nor are we saved by "How we feel" - we're saved through the promises of God fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus!
- I recently had a conversation with someone about salvation and basically the question of "How do you know that you are saved?"
- This person was really wrestling with this question because they didn't particularly *feel* saved. Or they didn't have a big crisis and big conversion moment...
- And I get it! There's a part of me that thinks "Gosh I wish I had a big conversion moment and felt something!"
- But there are times when we may not feel like God is our shield. There may be times when we do fear and doubt and question because life hasn't turned out how we want it to be...and maybe we feel like a failure to God...or maybe we feel unworthy of salvation...
- But our relationship with God isn't based on how we feel but on the word of God and on the work of God through Jesus.
 - *Let me put it this way, not speaking from experience, but imagine being a foreigner who is becoming an Australian Citizen...*
 - *When that letter arrives - it's not like you feel any more Australian...it's not like you suddenly have a vision of Steve Irwin and you have the urge to burst out into Waltzing Matilda..*
 - *But you can be assured that you're Australian by the promises given to you in that letter from the Government.*
 - *OR when Rach and I got married - yes there were a lot of feelings, joy, happiness, relief...but when our minister declared us married, I didn't particularly **feel** married...when we woke up the next morning, and for the mornings after that including **this** morning, we weren't suddenly completely in sync or have this perfect marriage...there are times when we **feel** apart - but that doesn't make us any less married...*
 - But our marriage is based on the covenant promises that we made to one another - regardless of how we feel.
- If you have said sorry to God for living your own way, confessed your sin and disobedience, and have turned your life intending to live for God - then have this great assurance that you are right with God. You are saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

- So do not fear.
- But know for sure.

- **Know for Sure**
- Let's read on from V7
 - "And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"
- Notice - Abram still has questions! He still wants some reassurance!
- And God in his kindness gives him a sign.
- V9 "He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."
- What God is about to do, is give Abram the sign of making a covenant.
- A covenant is essentially a very strong promise.
 - What would happen in those days when people were making covenants with one another is that they would get a bunch of animals.
 - They would kill them and cut them in half and create a bit of a walkway between them.
 - And the two parties would walk through together and say something along the lines of "If I break this promise, may I become like these animals"
 - Essentially - they are saying I'll keep this promise but if I don't I deserve to die and be cut up and disfigured.
- And so Abram goes into a deep sleep.
- V12 "As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain...."
- Abram asked - how can I know - God says, here, know for certain. Know for sure that your family will become a nation, will fall into slavery in another nation, but then come and inherit the land.
- And then V17-21
- "When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."
- The torch and pot represented God making a covenant with Abram...it went through the carcasses.
- This is how Abram can know for sure - because of the covenant of God with Abram!
- But I wonder if you noticed something...only God goes through the carcasses...only God makes the covenant to Abram - Abram doesn't make a covenant in return or go through the carcasses!
 - Every other covenant or agreement in writing these days is between two parties...not one party to another...it's usually a promise in return for something...
- But God doesn't get Abram to promise anything in return..why?
- Well because only God's word is sure, and only he can keep his promises. If we were to promise anything in return to God, there's no way that we could keep it!
 - We would deserve to be cut up like those animals in a heartbeat!
- But also - what on earth could Abram offer to God in return?
 - *There's a type of prayer which people might pray to God that I like to call the Homer Simpson Prayer....*
 - *Which goes like this "God, I know we haven't spoken in a while but if you get me out of this situation, I'll go to church more, give more money, be a better dad, and give up beer" as if we can bargain with God...and then he gets rescued from the situation and celebrates with a beer...*
 - But God doesn't need our stuff or our promises. Everything that we have is a gift from him!

- So whatever we promise him - he already has!
- Only God can covenant with us. Promise to us. The only thing that we can offer to him - is ourselves as a living sacrifice!
- And his promises are sure because he is eternal (his promises are eternal - it's not like they'll die with him) and he doesn't change (he doesn't lie!)
 - These promises have no expiry date!
- And because God walks through the carcasses alone, they aren't dependent on our performance, or our ability to hold up our end of the promises - but are dependent on God himself.
- IF we want more proof - we can trace how this works out in history.

- Because the nation does form, the people are enslaved in Egypt, but then rescued by YHW - only for them to turn their backs on YHW and worship a golden statue of a baby cow!
 - Does God then reject them? No. Because he is faithful to his covenant promises.
- Some time later after getting to the land of Canaan and God tells them to go and take it, they don't because they thought the Canaanites were too scary and too big. Eventually, the next generation gets partially into the land, but then they take on the practices of the Canaanites, and they forget about YHW..
 - Does God then reject them? No. Because he is faithful to his covenant promises.
- After getting fully into the land, they wanted to become like the other nations and have a king to be like all the other nations, even though God called them to be different from the other nations..
 - Does God then reject them? No. Because he is faithful to his covenant promises.
- Then the kings after David just get worse and worse...the nation divides into two, the kings continue to get worse and worse - some even sacrificing their own child in a form of pagan worship! God sends prophets to speak his words to them, but they kill the prophets and then they get taken away from the land as an act of judgement from God...
 - Does God then reject them? No. Because he is faithful to his covenant promises.
- They do get back into the land. And then God sends his one and only Eternal Son into the world - to this nation! God in flesh. But they reject him. And crucify him. The very people he came to save! God's chosen people!
 - Surely even now! Surely God rejects them and wipes his hands clean of them...No. Because he is faithful to his covenant promises.

- And today - these promises are our promises if we turn to him and accept them. The covenant to Abraham gets fulfilled and blown wide open in Jesus!
- We can see God's faithfulness to us on full display on that cross! Because in that death, he takes the sin of Abraham and us on himself.
 - Taking the covenant curses that we deserve on our behalf.
 - Drinking the cup of God's anger on our behalf.
 - And destroying them by taking it to the grave.
- And then we see the big fat tick and yes to all of this - when Jesus rose again.
- So then - whatever life throws at us, or whatever doubts spring into your mind...
 - Do not fear. God is your saviour, your shield and your protector. God is faithful no matter the circumstances that we find ourselves in! No matter our feelings about him - HE IS FAITHFUL!
 - No matter what is happening in your life right now or questions you might have - you can come to God in prayer. Cry out to him, throw yourself on him! Entrust yourself to him with everything! And he will be faithful to you.
 - Know that you are right with him through faith which means that you can come into the very presence of God through the blood of Jesus! And we can draw comfort and peace from him. And even when life isn't all okay at the moment - it WILL be all okay. He's got you in his hands..

- And there will come a time when he will take us into his new creation. The new land! Where there will be no more reason to doubt, no more tears or pain. And we will live with him in his presence.

- IF you want to be a part of this and if you want this certainty, if you want this great love and salvation and forgiveness - all you have to do is turn and trust in Jesus.
- It doesn't matter your past behaviour or way of life - we can't offer anything to God apart from our lives.
- The sacrifice that God accepts is a broken and contrite heart. A repentant and humble heart.
- And come and join in the saints right from Abraham's day praising God..
- As we'll soon sing:
 - "For why? (should we praise God?) The Lord our God is good; His mercy is forever sure;
 - His truth at all times firmly stood, And shall from age to age endure"