

Abraham is Justified by Faith

Text: Gen. 15:1-6

Introduction:

1. This chapter of Genesis contains some very significant, foundational truths that particularly affect two important areas of Bible doctrine:
 - Israelology – God’s covenant with Abraham is formalised in this passage. We refer to it as the Abrahamic Covenant. It is foundational to a right understanding of God’s plan for Israel.
 - Soteriology – This chapter and particularly verse 6 forms the backbone of the doctrine of justification by faith. The Apostle Paul appeals to it in both Romans and Galatians as a major argument in His thesis of Salvation.
2. In this chapter we also have some significant first mentions:
 - It is the first time the phrase “the word of the LORD” appears in the Bible.
 - It is the first time the phrase “Fear not” appears.
 - Is it the first time the words ‘vision’, ‘shield’ and ‘reward’ are mentioned.
 - It contains the first specific mention of faith – Abraham “believed in the LORD”.
 - It is the first time being “counted righteous” (justification) is mentioned.
3. We will study this chapter that deals with the Abrahamic Covenant under four headings:
 - The Context of the Covenant (Vs. 1-3)
 - The Contents of the Covenant (Vs. 4-7)
 - The Ceremony of the Covenant (Vs. 8-12)
 - The Confirmation of the Covenant (Vs. 13-21)

I. THE CONTEXT OF THE COVENANT (VS. 1-3)

Let’s set the scene and the occasion of the giving of this covenant. Take note of:

A. The Battle of the Enemy (Vs. 1a)

1. The verse begins with the words “After these things” which is a reference to the events that had just transpired in the previous chapter.
2. Having passed the test and having demonstrated surrender and yieldedness to the Lord’s will, Abraham is now ready to receive further Revelation and blessings from God Almighty.

B. The Blessing of the Lord (Vs. 1b)

1. The Blessing of God’s Revelation – “the word of the LORD came”. This is the first time in the Bible you find the phrase “the word of the Lord came”. The phrase “the word of the Lord” appears 258 times in the Bible. There is no greater blessing God could bestow upon us than His Word – the Written and the Living Word; the Scriptures and His Son.

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2. The Blessing of God's Protection – "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield". Barnhouse said: "Cowards are afraid before a battle; heroes are afraid afterward...The man who administers a defeat to the world becomes a target for its hatred."
3. The Blessing of God's Reward – "and thy exceeding great reward." There is no greater reward than God Himself! The greatest gift/reward God has given us is the gift of Himself, His Own Dear Son to be our friend, Saviour and Redeemer. "To have God is to have all, though bereft of everything. To be destitute of God is to be bereft of everything, though having all." (F. B. Meyer) This was a significant promise in light of the fact Abraham had just turned down the offer of incredible wealth from the king of Sodom. "How much are the Lord's people losing today because of their acceptance of the world's favours." (Pink)

C. The Bewilderment of Abraham (Vs. 2-3)

These verses record Abraham's response to God's promise to be His reward. This was not a statement of fleshly doubt on the part of Abraham as much as it was the inquiry of faith. Abraham took God at His Word but He was perplexed as to how God was going to fulfill His promise. The two areas that Abraham grappled with are often the two same things we struggle with in seeking to discern and follow God's will. Abraham was perplexed over:

1. The Waiting for God to accomplish His Will. God had promised Abraham some years earlier that he would make of him a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3) and that He would make his seed as the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:14-16). As the years rolled by, it appeared nothing was going to happen. Abraham was now in his eighties and it had been about 10 years since he entered the land of Canaan. We need to remember a few basic truths about waiting in the Christian life:
 - a. Waiting is a part of God's dealings with us in the Christian life. We need to remember that in this age where we expect everything instantly.
 - b. Waiting is a part of how God tests and ultimately strengthens our faith.
 - c. Waiting is about bringing us to the end of our own wisdom, resources and reliance. In Abraham's case, God would deliberately delay giving them a child so that it would require a miracle, thus bringing great glory to Himself.
 - d. Are you in a waiting period of your Christian life? Perhaps you believe God has revealed something to you concerning His will for your life but you are confused at the apparent inactivity of God to fulfill it. Remember, God is doing something in you and heed the counsel of Scripture "**Wait** on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: **wait**, I say, on the LORD." (Psalm 27:14)
 - e. Personal Illustration: "God is not in a rush with preparing His servants".
 - f. As a general principle, it is not usually God's will for us to rush things in the Christian life. "Also, *that* the soul *be* without

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knowledge, *it is* not good; and he that hasteth with *his* feet sinneth.” (Prov. 19:2)

2. The Way God would accomplish His Will. As time passed and the possibility of Sarah conceiving became more remote from a human standpoint, Abraham began to think that perhaps his steward would be his heir. We also often struggle with discerning “how” God is going to accomplish His will. Remember, it is rarely accomplished according to how we **think** it will be accomplished. God has a way of accomplishing His purposes in such a way that we are reminded that He is God, seated as Sovereign upon the throne.
3. Warren Wiersbe notes, “One of the basic lessons in the “school of faith” is: God’s will must be fulfilled in God’s way and in God’s time. God did not expect Abraham and Sarah to figure out how to have an heir; all He asked was that they be available so He could accomplish His purposes in and through them. What Abraham and Sarah did not realize was that God was waiting for them to be “as good as dead” so that God alone would receive the power and glory.”

II. THE CONTENTS OF THE COVENANT (VS. 4-7)

Abraham’s plea forms the basis for the covenant promise that follows. There are two main promises in the Abrahamic Covenant. God had promised these two things to Abraham previously but now further Revelation is given and the promises are ratified in a covenant. In the Abrahamic Covenant there is:

A. The Promise of a Seed (Vs. 4-6)

1. The Specifics of the Promise (Vs. 4).
 - a. Who would NOT be his heir (Vs. 4a). Eliezer, his steward, would not be the heir as Abraham had thought. Be prepared for the Lord to correct your thinking in the Christian life! Often our thoughts are not right. Remember, your human mind is not infallible. Sometimes our thoughts are outright wrong!
 - b. Who WOULD BE his heir (Vs. 4b). God promises Abraham that he would have a son by natural generation.
2. The Simile of the Promise (Vs. 5a).
 - a. Previously God had likened Abraham’s seed to the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16); now He likens it to the stars of heaven. This means that whether Abraham looked down at the dust beneath his feet or up to the stars above his head, he would be reminded of God’s promise.
 - b. “Before, He had said Abram’s seed would be as the dust of the earth. Now, he says they will be as the stars of heaven. Not only does this imply a great number, but perhaps also that the sphere of activity of the promised seed in the eternal ages will be both on earth and in heaven.” (Henry Morris)
3. The Seed of the Promise (Vs. 5b). Clearly God’s plan included his natural descendants but also looked beyond that to an even bigger and grander plan. Consider the threefold fulfillment of the promised seed. There would be:

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- a. The Natural Seed of Abraham – the nation of Israel. Israel would be God’s chosen people through whom He would bring both the Written Word (the Scriptures) and the Living Word (the Saviour) to a lost and needy world. Remember, Israel is not the church and God has not yet finished with Israel. There are many promises yet to be fulfilled for God’s chosen people.
 - b. The Spiritual Seed of Abraham – The New Testament makes it clear that this promise extends to believers who become spiritual seed of Abraham by faith. Galatians 3:7 “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” Galatians 3:29 “And if ye *be* Christ’s, **then are ye Abraham’s seed**, and heirs according to the promise.” See also Romans 4:16-18. William Macdonald suggests “the dust pictures Abram’s natural posterity – those who are Jews by birth. The stars depict his spiritual seed – those who are justified by faith (Gal. 3:7).”
 - c. The Messianic Seed of Abraham – through Abraham’s line the promised Messiah would come. Gal. 3:16 “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, **And to thy seed, which is Christ.**” Abraham grasped this aspect of the promise of God and gazed down the corridors of time with the eye of faith to the coming of the Promised Redeemer. The Lord Jesus said of Abraham, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.” (John 8:56)
4. The Salvation Response to the Promise (Vs. 6)
- We come to one of the most important verses in the Bible as it forms the bedrock of the doctrine of salvation. It is quoted in three Epistles in the New Testament – Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23. It is the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit highlights early in the canon of Scripture that justification in the sight of God is by faith alone, not works. The word ‘believe’ is “the biggest word in the chapter, one of the greatest in the Old Testament!” (Leupold).
1. Faith’s Definition – “and he believed”. Abraham took God completely at His Word and that’s faith (Romans 10:17). Regarding faith, the “fundamental idea is that of total confidence in, total reliance upon, total dependence upon another, or complete trust in a statement, thing or a person” (Sorenson). Faith is “firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing.” (Vines) A.W. Tozer expressed it well, “Faith is the gaze of the soul upon a saving God.” Salvation has always been only by grace through faith. In the Gospel of John, which was written to tell people how to be saved (John 20:31), the word ‘believe’ is used nearly 100 times (98 times by my count).
 2. Faith’s Object – “in the LORD”. God is the focal point of true saving faith. It is only faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work that brings salvation. Not faith in men but faith in “the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

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- a. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4 and makes it a major argument in his thesis on salvation by faith without works.
 - b. Romans 4:1-4 (1) "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? (2) For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. (3) **For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.** (4) Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. (5) But to him that worketh not, but **believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly**, his faith is **counted** for righteousness."
 - a. The message of the Bible is clear, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." (Acts 16:31)
 - b. Isaiah 45:22 "**Look unto me**, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else."
3. Faith's Result – "and he counted it to him for righteousness".
- a. This is the first occurrence of the word 'counted' in the Bible and it is a significant salvation word. It is also the key word in Romans 4 being used 8 times in that key justification chapter ('reckon'; 'impute' & 'count').
 - b. It means to credit or deposit to one's account. "It has the sense of being recorded in a ledger, accounted, computed, or calculated. It particularly has the sense of all of the above being done mentally, such as coming to a conclusion, making a decision, or figuring something out." (Sorenson)
The same Greek word is translated 'think' 9 times in the N.T.
 - c. Note: This is not a Catholic concept of an infused righteousness where justification is seen as a "process" through works-based sacraments such as baptism, penance and confession to a priest but an imputed righteousness, a moment in time forensic declaration by God that this sinner is righteous.
 - d. Illustration: The Pharisee and the Publican pray in the temple. Luke 18:9-14 (9) "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: (10) Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. (11) The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. (12) I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. (13) And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. (14) I tell you, this man went down to his house **justified** *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."
 - e. Romans 5:1-2 "Therefore being **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom

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also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

- a. F. B. Meyer: “We cannot realize all that is included in those marvellous words. This only is evident, that faith unites us so absolutely to the Son of God that we are One with Him for evermore; and all the glory of His character – not only what He was when He became obedient unto death, but what He is in the majesty of His risen nature – is reckoned unto us.”

B. The Promise of a Land (Vs. 7; 18-21)

1. The Beneficiaries of the Land (Vs. 7)
 - a. The land would be given to Abraham and to his descendants.
 - b. Notice how this is a repeated theme in Scripture:
 - i. Genesis 13:15 – “For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.”
 - ii. Genesis 15:7 – “...to give thee this land to inherit it.”
 - iii. Genesis 15:18 – “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land...”
2. The Boundaries of the Land (Vs. 18-21)

These verses spell out the geographical area that would be given to Abraham and his seed. There are a number of markers given that outline the extent of the promised land. Take notice of:

 - a. The Geographical markers (Vs. 18b). Two rivers are mentioned as forming the outer boundaries of the promised land.
 - i. The River of Egypt – forms the southern boundary of the promised land. This could be a reference to the Nile River but it is more likely the stream south of Gaza now known as Wadi El Arish.
 - ii. The River Euphrates – forms the northern boundary of the promised land.
 - b. The Nation markers (Vs. 19-20). Israel would possess the land in between these two rivers that was inhabited at that time by these 10 nations.
 - c. The closest Israel got to the full possession of the promised land was during the reign of Solomon. But in reality, Israel has never fully possessed the entire covenant land but she will one day in the Millennium.

To be continued in next sermon...

Conclusion:

1. Are you in a season of waiting as a believer? Perhaps beginning to doubt or feel discouraged? Wait on and trust in God. He will fulfill His will in your life in His will and time.
2. Have you been justified by faith or are you trusting in your own works? Look to Christ and Christ alone today for your salvation.