

Why Is Faith Extraordinary? (Part 2)

Genesis 15:7-21

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Good morning! It is good to see you today. May is such a crazy month for our family. Our calendar is jam packed. Anyone else experiencing the same thing? This weekend alone we traveled to New Iberia for my niece's graduation on Friday night, and on Saturday we had volleyball playoff games for my girls.

And then, in between those games, we went to another awesome event. Lacey Porter, our children's minister, got married yesterday. She married Jake King, a godly Christian man who is currently serving our country in the Navy. Now, we get to see how long it will take us to remember to call her Lacey King. It is going to take me a while.

The classic Christian wedding ceremony is a pretty amazing thing to witness. You have the two sides which are made up of each family, and the bride and groom come forth from their families to start their new family.

They each take their turns walking down the aisle, and when they pass through they pledge their vows. They make a covenant together before God with their family and friends as witnesses, that they will love, honor, and cherish one another until death alone parts them.

So, a wedding is a perfect example of a covenant ceremony in our present day. Today, as we continue our series Extraordinary Faith, we are picking up where we left off in Genesis 15:7-21. In these verses, we are going to see God use a ritual ceremony to formalize a covenant that he makes with Abraham, and what that means for us as Christians today.

We see in these Old Testament passages that God's work in Abraham and his chosen people of Israel often connects to experiences for the believer in Christ. So, what literally and physically happens to Abraham and the Israelites sets a pattern and foreshadows the reality for Christians today.

Last week, through Abraham's story in Genesis 15:1-6, we saw these connections as we began to answer the question "Why is faith extraordinary?" Faith in and of itself is ordinary, but we learned that faith becomes extraordinary when the object of our faith is God. He is our shield and our very great reward.

Why is faith extraordinary?

- 1. The Object of our faith is God (Gen. 15:1)**
- 2. Through faith we are made right with God (Gen. 15:2-6)**

We also saw that through faith we are made right with God. Abraham had faith in God's promise to give him a son which made him right with God. This one verse in Genesis 15:6 sets a pattern for salvation throughout scripture.

Genesis 15:6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Through Abraham's son and descendants came Jesus Christ, God's one and only son. We follow the pattern of salvation when we have faith in God's one and only son Jesus Christ. We are saved from our sin and enter a relationship with him.

So, we are going to finish answering the question "Why is faith extraordinary?" by picking where we left off in Genesis 15:7-8.

7 The Lord also said to Abraham, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

8 But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

Why is faith extraordinary?

- 1. The Object of our faith is God (Gen. 15:1)**
- 2. Through faith we are made right with God (Gen. 15:2-6)**
- 3. Through Faith We Have Assurance of God's Promises. (Gen. 15:7-21)**

Abraham has already been declared righteous by believing God for his promised son, but now God reiterates his promise to give Abraham a land he will be able to possess. But, what does Abraham do? He asks God for assurance. "How can I know that I will gain possession of it?"

Abraham already had saving faith, but he wanted to know how he could possess God's promise. He is hungry to know how he can experience it to the fullest extent. Isn't that the case at times?

Have you ever been hungry for God's assurance? Have you ever asked God that question, "How can I know?" "God, I believe you, but at times my experience doesn't seem to match my belief. So, God help me to know."

"Help me to know to the fullest extent that I am saved?" "God, how can I know that I am going to go to heaven when I die?" Help me to know it fully. Or in the midst of a trial, you say "God I need you right now...How can I know you are with me? Help me to know. I don't know how this is going to pan out God...How can I know?"

Here's the truth: The search for assurance is common to the Christian experience.

3. Through Faith We Have Assurance of God's Promises. (Genesis 15:7-21) **a. The Search for Assurance (v. 7)**

This doesn't happen all of the time, but there are certain seasons in life where we need God's help to have continued confidence in what he has promised.

You see, when it is all said and done, we as Christians will have experience in two spiritual wars. The first war happened between two points in our lives: "what we were" and "what we are now". Let me show you in Scripture what I'm talking about. Ephesians 2:1:

Ephesians 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

Ephesians 2:4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

What we were - dead in our transgressions; What we are now - Alive in Christ. That war in between was fought and won by Christ on the cross and by his grace through faith we are saved. And, then there is a war that happens between "what we are now" and "what we will be." 1 John 3:1-2 says,

1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

So, what are we now? We are alive in Christ as children of God. What will we be? We shall be like him when he appears and we see him as he is. There is a war that is being fought in between these two spiritual realities now. Ultimately, Jesus has already won this war. The end is already determined, but we still have battles in this Christian walk.

And Satan is so cunning. He says, “you know what would really mess this Christian up...if I put some lies in his heart and get him to think that he is not who God says he is and that he cannot possess what God already says is his.

In this battle, don't we have moments like the father of the demon possessed boy who sought deliverance for his son in Mark 9, who cries out to the Lord, “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief.”

So, if you have similar questions of the Lord today, just know that you are not alone. You are not weird. It doesn't make you less of a Christian. Abraham, the father of our faith, asked the same question too. But, Who did he ask for assurance? Verse 8 says,

8 But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

In his search for assurance, Abraham went to the perfect source for assurance - our Sovereign Lord.

- 4. Through Faith We Have Assurance for God's Promises. (Genesis 15:7-21)**
 - a. The Search for Assurance (v.7-8)**
 - b. The Source of Assurance (v. 8)**

He doesn't go to other sources to try and figure out how he is going to go about possessing the promise. So it is when we are seeking assurance, we need to go to our Sovereign Lord. God is all knowing. If anyone will know the plan and how it is going to be accomplished, there is no better source than the Source himself.

I read the news pretty much every day. The thing that makes a news story trustworthy is the source of the report. If the source isn't a first hand witness of an event, or if the source has a low level of credibility, then it affects the validity of the story.

But, what if God is the source of the story? Then he would be the most reliable witness that we could ever have, and his testimony would be true. And where do you think that we can go to find reliable news and reliable testimony that will give us continued assurance for our faith? The Bible, God's Holy Word! 1 John 5:9-13 describes this perfectly.

1 John 5:9 We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son.

10 Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

And, if you ever need God to assure you that you are saved, your assurance is right here in the next verse.

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Do you trust God as a witness? Do you trust God's testimony about his son Jesus Christ, that he died on the cross for your sins, that he was buried, and rose again on the third day; and, if you believe in him for your salvation, then you can know that you have eternal life. You can settle that in your heart today. Be assured, If you believe God's testimony about Jesus, then you are saved.

Oh, how much better off we are than Abraham in the sense that God's Word came to him sporadically in dreams and visions. There are less than ten recordings of God's Word coming to Abraham in scripture. But, we have access to his word all of the time.

And, it is heartbreaking that we don't take advantage of this like we should. If you don't have a Bible, send me an email this week. andrew@northshorechurch.net. I'll recommend one for you. Or, get the Bible App on your phone. Start reading one paragraph or one chapter a day. You can start in the book of John.

However, in his need for assurance, Abraham didn't have God's written Word. So, in these next verses, God gave him instructions in a vision to prepare a sacrifice for a

covenant ceremony that he would use to give him assurance. Let's read Genesis 15:9-21:

Genesis 15:9 So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon."

10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.

11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.

13 Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there.

14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. **15** You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age.

16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—

19 the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, **20** Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, **21** Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

This part of the story all sounds so strange to us doesn't it? But, this was a common ancient covenant ceremony that God used to assure Abraham of his possession of the land.

The kind of ceremony would begin with a sacrifice. The animals were cut in half and the halves were placed into two groups with an aisle separating them. The blood of the

animals would pool in the aisle. And the two parties making a covenant agreement would both walk through the sacrifice.

As they walked they would declare their part of the agreement. Let's just say it was a loan agreement for a piece of land. The seller would walk through declaring commitment: I agree to loan \$3000 to this man for the land at a rate of 10% interest. The other man would walk through declaring his commitment: I agree to pay this man \$275 each month for one year.

As they walked through, the blood would soak into the bottom of their garments. This whole process signified the seriousness of the commitment they were making together. They walked through death to show their commitment was as serious as death. It's as if they were saying, I would rather give my life than break this commitment.

It sounds much more grotesque than the wedding ceremony we talked about earlier, but there are similarities: two halves, an aisle, and making a commitment while walking through, until death do us part.

So, Abram prepares this sacrifice and waits, and after a while he falls asleep and a terrible darkness comes upon him. The Word of the Lord comes and informs him that his descendent will possess the land, but they will have to wait 400 years, which signifies the 400 years they waited in slavery in Egypt.

The Lord says, "as your people wait for all of this to happen, they will be strangers in another country, they will suffer through trials, but they will come out of that with great possessions. At the same time of their waiting, God, in both his loving patience and justice, waited 400 years to dispossess the sinful, vile, and evil inhabitants currently in the promised land.

Then, in this literal darkness of night and with this spiritual darkness that had come over him, the presence of the Lord was manifest through smoke and fire. The Lord manifested his presence as a smoking firepot (a furnace) with a blazing torch and he passed through the sacrifice alone.

So, God alone guaranteed his covenant with Abraham by calling out his commitment to the terms. He said, "I will give you a people, your own descendants. I will give your people a land", and he even described the boundaries. "I will give your people power to have victory over the evil forces on your way to possessing the land."

Terms of the Abrahamic Covenant

People
Land
Power

So, the terms of the covenant that God made with Abraham were to give him people, Land, and Power. Isn't it amazing that these are the same terms that God has promised in his new covenant through Jesus Christ.

God prepared the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world. And through the blood of his son Jesus Christ, he called out his commitments. I promise that those who believe in my son will be my people, my children. I promise that those who believe in my son will have eternal life as their inheritance.

I promise that anyone who believes in my son, will have the power to overcome evil, affliction, and suffering until they receive that prize. So, these are the promises for the new covenant in Christ:

Terms of the New Covenant

1. **People** (Believers in Christ)
2. **Land** (Heaven with Christ)
3. **Power** (Victorious Life in Christ)

But, it is this last one, Power, in which believers hunger most for assurance. As the people of God long for the heavenly land to dwell with him, don't we often need assurance most when we feel powerless? Don't we often need assurance when we can't see much victory happening in our lives? So, how does this assurance take root in us? Let's read in Ephesians 1:15-17

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

The Holy Spirit of God is deposited in our hearts guaranteeing our inheritance. And, it is the Spirit of God by which assurance takes root in us to give us a continued renewal of confidence in God's promises until our heavenly redemption.

3. Through Faith We Have Assurance of God's Promises. (Genesis 15:7-21)

- a. **The Search for Assurance (v.7-8)**
- b. **The Source for Assurance (v. 8)**
- c. **The Spirit for Assurance (v. 9-21)**

In John 14, Jesus told his disciples that when he left his earth he would be going to prepare a place for them. This promise is for all of his followers. And, though we cannot take up residence there yet, he promised his Holy Spirit, his Holy Presence, to take up residence in these earthly temples. Listen to what Jesus promises the Spirit will do:

John 14:26: But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.

So, here is how this works. When we as believers hunger and search for assurance, we need to go to the source for assurance, our sovereign Lord, through prayer and His word. Then we walk by faith according to the Holy Spirit who is continually reminding us and guiding us with this truth. For example:

Abraham had a thick and dreadful darkness come over him. Have you ever had a terrible darkness come over you? For some of you, this is a battle that you fight often. It's almost debilitating, and you start to wonder if your life has meaning or purpose anymore. In these moments when you hunger and are searching for assurance you need to go to the source for assurance.

Pray and ask our Sovereign Lord for his help. Go to his Word for truth. If you don't know where to turn, ask a friend to give you a verse. Perhaps the Lord would lead you to a truth like Matthew 5:

4 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Now that you have your truth, don't deny it, but walk by faith in the Spirit according to the truth. "Lord, I'm in a dark place, but I want to be your light to the world. So, by faith I'm going to let your light shine through me today however you lead. Getting out, going to church, to a small group, reconnecting with a friend, encouraging someone. Spirit lead me.

The Israelites were sorely mistreated at the hands of their enemies while they awaited the possession of their promised land. Do you have enemies? Do you have people who persecute you and belittle you for your faith? Do you have people in your life who are just against you for some reason?

In your search for assurance on what to do, go to the source, our sovereign Lord in prayer and in his word. Ask a Christian friend for a verse. You may come across one like Proverbs 25:21-22

Proverbs 25:21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. 22 In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

Then, walk by faith in the Spirit according to the truth. Instead of doing what your flesh wants you to do, seek ways that you can love your enemy and God will reward you with the kind of victory that he wants to give you. Here's another example:

Abraham needed assurance from God because he understood that possessing the promised land would require dispossessing the pagans. In a similar way, the Christian life will be a continual dispossessing of the old pagan life in which we used to live, the raging battle that we face with sin.

The greatest times of need for assurance have been a result of my own personal battles with sin. "God, What do I do with this?" "Do you love me less God?" "How can I be close to you again?" So in my search for assurance, I went to the source through prayer and his word. He led me to 1 John:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

So, by faith in the Spirit according to the truth, I humbly go before God, confessing, agreeing with him that I have sinned against him and then by faith I trust him that he purifies me from unrighteousness. Then, with a clear conscience, his light shines brighter in my heart.

This is the power of the Spirit that is available to all of us so that we can live a victorious life in Christ. It's a result of the new Covenant of Christ, guaranteed by God himself. The Spirit seals it and it is deposited in our hearts working to assure us as believers in Christ.

The very presence of God is at work in us like the smoking furnace, purifying us, burning away the impurities of our sinful flesh, and like a blazing torch giving us more and more of his light as we journey in this life toward the prize of our heavenly promised Land.

In response today, we are going to partake in another ancient ceremony that Jesus initiated with his disciples, the Lord's Supper. Jesus knows and loves us. He knew that we would need assurance in our walk with him. This is one of the main reasons why he says, "Do This In Remembrance of Me." Remembering what he has done gives us assurance.

Mark 14:22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

23 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,"

You see that covenant connection from our story today and the words of Christ. His body was given for us on the cross. His blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins. So, as you remember him today through this ceremony, I want you to remember him for those three things: people, land, power.

Remember what he did so that we could become children of God. Remember him for his promise to prepare an eternal home of rest with him. And remember him for the life that we can by his spirit residing in us.

While we sing this song, you can go to the tables in the corners of the room. You can either eat and drink the elements there or bring them back to your seat and partake of them there.

The Lord's Supper is for believers only. Parents I invite you to use this as an opportunity to talk more with your children if they do not believe. I also invite anyone who has not believed in the Lord Jesus for salvation to come to either side of the stage today and speak with one of the pastors so that we can counsel you.