

Why is Faith Extraordinary?

Genesis 15:1-6

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Good morning! It's good to see all of you. I am Andrew Ogea the Pastor of Worship and Discipleship here at Northshore for those who don't know me. I am grateful to Pastor Larry for giving me the opportunity to share God's Word with you today. We will be in Genesis 15. So you can turn there in your Bibles now, and if you don't have one, the Scriptures will be on the screen.

Happy Mother's Day to you moms out there. Moms are a gift! I am not embarrassed to tell you that I am a momma's boy. I love my mom and I am grateful for her. She is a gift to me and my family.

I'm also thankful for my wife and the wonderful mom that she is to our kiddos. She just has the touch. I've said it often - When momma is around, the kids thrive. When it's up to me, I just keep them alive. They survive.

I look across the room today at all of the great moms and I am just grateful for the way that God has blessed the families of our church. So, we celebrate you moms. You are a gift from the Lord.

I asked a few moms in our church this week to think about and respond to a question about being a mom. I wanted to hear some testimonies about motherhood as I prepared to preach today. Perhaps all of you moms would want the same opportunity to reflect this week. So, here is the question:

Think about a time when you were struggling as a mom...What truth or promise of God helped you get through it?

The stories I received back were really touching. Reading them and the experience of doing life with our church family throughout the years has helped me to more fully understand that mother's day can bring about different emotions in moms depending on life circumstances.

On the one hand there is joy that comes from loving, nurturing, growing, investing, teaching, and discipling our children. There is also joy in having a mom who has done that for us as children.

So, mother's day brings joy, but on the other hand, it can be a painful day. Some of you have had an absent mother. For others, your mother has passed away, and you can attest to the pain today brings. If you have lost a child, you can attest to the grief and difficulty. Some of you ladies want to be a mom, but you are still waiting, and so today is hard. So there is both joy and pain.

There is also strength. Helping and seeing children navigate relationships, overcome fears, succeed in education and sports, become self-sufficient in life, learn from mistakes, accept Christ, follow Christ, marry a godly spouse, and advance in a career brings a sense of strength. Things may not be perfect, but mother's day can make moms feel strong.

But, just as easily, life circumstances can make mother's day a reminder of how fragile things are. Some of you have a mom who is sick. Some have a sick child. Some of you have a rebellious or wayward child.

Others have children who are experiencing strained relationships. Often times, moms take all that weight on themselves and therefore mother's day can be a day where you feel fragile. Your faith in God may be unbroken, but you are fragile.

Thankfully we have a Heavenly Father who knows exactly how to minister grace to our hearts. And I pray whether we are feeling strong or fragile, or experiencing joy or pain, that today's message would help you to grow in faith. That is what this series is all about, extraordinary faith.

We are learning about Abram, whose name was later changed by God to Abraham. He is known as the father of our faith. If you recall from Pastor Larry's sermon last week, we learned in Genesis 12 that the Lord called Abraham to leave his family and country and travel to the land that God would show him.

God promised to make him the father of a great nation even though he had no children of his own. He promised to bless him, make his name great, and that Abraham would be a blessing. In fact, the Lord said that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him.

So, Abraham had faith in God and he obeyed. He left for a land that God would show him. But, Abraham added to God's instructions by taking his nephew Lot and his family with him.

This addition caused many problems for Abraham, one of which involved Lot and his family being captured in a war conflict between two groups of kings. One group of four kings led by a king named Kedorlaomer defeated another group of 5 kings which included the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Lot and his family was living in Sodom and when Kedorlaomer defeated those armies, took Lot, his family, and possessions as part of the spoils of war. When Abraham received word of this, he took 318 men born in his household and chased down Kedorlaomer and defeated his allied armies.

He rescued Lot and his family, recovered all of the goods seized in the conflict, and returned those goods to the king of Sodom. Even though the king offered him all of the goods, Abraham refused because he had sworn an oath to God, so that no one else could ever take credit for making him rich. This is where we pick up in God's Word today. In Genesis 15:1-6, we read:

Genesis 15:1 After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

2 But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?”

3 And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

4 Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.”

5 He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

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

So the chapter begins with the words “After this” - After the events I just summarized for you, “the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision. This is the first time of many that this phrase is used in Scripture.

It is used when God's Word is spoken through the prophets or when a prophecy is given to a biblical character. So, this shows Abraham's role in Scripture as a prophet. The

phrase also introduces specific commands, truths, or prophecies from God to his people.

So, the word of the Lord which comes to him starts off with a command (“Do not be afraid”). Abraham is experiencing fear. Why would he be afraid? Against incredible odds, he and 318 men were victorious against king Kedorlaomer and four armies. Shouldn’t he be experiencing the thrill, strength, and confidence of victory? Why does he fear?

If we look at the context of the previous chapters, we can surmise that his fear is a combination of three factors: Danger, Discouragement, Distress (Adapted from Thomas Whitelaw)¹

Fear Factors

- 1. Danger**
- 2. Discouragement**
- 3. Distress**

First, danger is a reality despite Abraham’s recent victory. He has had time to think and reflect: “What now? Will Kedorlaomer regroup? Will he retaliate? Have I just invited future conflict to my household? I’ve been a foreigner living off the grid on someone else’s land. Have I just brought unwanted attention to myself?”

Second is discouragement. God has promised that Abraham would be the father of a mighty nation. However, in following his oath to the Lord, he just forfeited significant wealth by not taking any of the spoils of war. Yes, Abraham is operating in reliance upon God, but having an abundance of resources would certainly quicken the growth of a nation.

Third is distress. He especially cannot have a mighty nation if he has no heir or land of his own. So, Abraham’s faith in God’s promise is not broken, but in his human comprehension, he just cannot see how this promise will come to fruition. He is now roughly 85 years old and its already been around ten years since God made this promise to him in Genesis 13. God said:

Genesis 13:15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.

¹Adapted from Thomas Whitelaw, *Genesis*, Pulpit Commentary, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), 217.

16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

So out of his distress, his anxiousness about the promise, he complains to God. “Am I misunderstanding you God? I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eleizer of Damascus. You have given me no children; so I suppose a servant in my household will be my heir. Proverbs 13:12 speaks to this kind of distress:

Proverbs 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick.

He has faith, but he just doesn’t know how God is going to do it. So he starts looking around at what is in front of him. I guess I’ll just adopt Eliezer. Have you ever had a moment like that in your heart when you say:

“God I trust you, but I don’t know how you are going to pull this off. I know what you have spoken to my heart about that (whatever that may be), but maybe what you meant is for me to settle for this instead.

Danger. Discouragement. Distress welling up to fear right after an incredible victory. Abraham has it all. And, his experience shows us something that is true about being human. Isn’t it the case that:

Some of our greatest battles with fear come on heels of victory.

History is full of examples. One is the Cold War which was a political conflict mainly brought about by the fear of nuclear war with Russia. This came on the heels of the incredible allied victory over Germany and Japan in World War II.

What about Biblical examples? Think about the Israelites who didn’t enter the promised land because they feared the people living in the land. And this came on the heels of God miraculously delivering them from slavery in Egypt, and his defeat of Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea.

This happens so often in our daily walk. Just the other day, I spoke with a mom who said, “The thought of my son graduating high school brings me so much joy. It’s going to be an incredible achievement.”

“But, it’s starting to hit me really hard. My son will no longer be with me in my home. In just a short time I won’t be able to wake him up, make sure he is fed, help him with school, or guide him through daily issues. And that scares me to death!”

You see how quickly the joy, confidence, and strength of an achievement or victory can morph into fear. But, the word of the Lord comes and he says, “Do not be afraid!”

I believe wholeheartedly that someone here needs to hear that command today. You are gripped by fear because of your circumstances. Your mind is consumed with “What ifs” and “What could happen.” Perhaps you have some danger, discouragement, and distress in your life that is welling up to fear and your heart is fragile.

So, what do we do? What is the answer to fear? Have faith. What is faith? The Bible tells us in Hebrews 11:1

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

That is what faith is, but our series is called Extraordinary Faith. So, what makes it extraordinary? Why is faith extraordinary? The first reason we find in the passage is that faith is extraordinary because the object of faith is God.

Why is faith extraordinary?

1. The Object of Faith is God

Faith in and of itself is not extraordinary. The difference between ordinary faith and extraordinary faith is completely dependent on the object of our faith. Have you ever heard a mom say “my kid would never do that.” Maybe you have said it yourself.

Or, maybe in the early days of marriage, a young wife or husband has faith that their spouse won’t disappoint them or fail them. Or, a novice investor who has faith that he will always yield a return in the stock market.

This type of faith isn’t extraordinary because the object of the faith in these examples are fallible people or imperfect systems. But the reason the Christian’s faith is extraordinary is because the object of the faith is our extraordinary God.

Why is faith extraordinary?

2. The Object of Faith is God

a. He is our shield

And, right in the midst of these few verses, our extraordinary God says to Abraham, and he is saying to us, “Do not be afraid.” Why? God says, “I am your shield.” The object of

our faith is God and he is extraordinary because he is our shield. Even if Abraham's enemies should retaliate, God commands him not to fear, but to trust in him as his shield. This reminded me of a Psalm of King David, Psalm 3:

Psalm 3:1 Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! 2 Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."

3 But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. 4 I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain.

Psalm 3:5 I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. 6 I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side. 7 Arise, Lord! Deliver me, my God!

We don't have to fear because God is our shield. He covers us. He protects his children. Just think about the Armor of God that the Apostle Paul writes of in Ephesians 6. The armor consists of everything that God is and everything that he provides. Paul says God is truth. God is righteousness. God is the gospel of peace. So we are commanded to put on what God is.

And then he provides. God indwells us with his His Spirit. God gives us his word. God grants us salvation. God enables us with faith. So, we are told to take up what God provides. And do you know what part of the armor of God that is faith? Ephesians 6:16

Eph. 6:15 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

"I am your shield." I protect you. I cover you. Have faith in me. Take hold of me. We don't have to be afraid. Our faith is extraordinary because the object of our faith is our extraordinary God, and He is our shield. In addition, the Lord says,

Gen 15:1b "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

Why is faith extraordinary?

- 1. The Object of Faith is God**
 - a. He is Our Shield**
 - b. He is Our Very Great Reward**

The word reward here means "wage." The wage that Abraham will receive from God far outshines anything he could have ever taken from the king of Sodom - the spoils of war.

And what God gives is something greater than land or a nation.. We see here that the greatest reward Abraham could ever possess is having the Lord himself as his God. God later reiterates this to Abraham again in Chapter 17:7-8:

Gen. 17:7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

8 The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

This puts things into perspective as we follow the Lord. Undeservedly, we get rewards that come from his promises, but sometimes we have to wait for his promises and purposes to be fulfilled in our lives.

Abraham has been waiting, but this portion of his story reminds us and encourages us that the greater reward is always our relationship with him. Even in the waiting, he is our reward. Thomas Whitelaw, a pastor and theologian, wrote about this in his commentary:

God’s saints are prone to seek their happiness in God’s gifts, rather than the Giver. In Genesis 15, they are recalled along with Abram to the sublime thought that God himself is his people’s best reward,

and that the possession and enjoyment of his friendship should abundantly compensate for the absence of creature comforts, however dearly prized and ardently desired.

He is such a Good Father, and in our waiting, he comes to us. He comforts us. And in verses 4-5 I just picture this Good Father taking his son outside, and putting his arm around his child. “Son, look at the stars, and count them if you can.”

Now, this isn’t a Slidell night sky we are talking about here. Have you ever been outside at night in an area that is pitch black and looked up at the stars. The most amazing star gazing experience for me was in the mountains of Haiti. No electricity. No lights. So dark that the only light you have is from the sky.

One night I woke up and had to go the restroom, and on my way back to the shack we were sleeping in, I looked up. I had never before seen the night sky like that, nor have I since. There was a multitude of stars visible that we just can't see here in Slidell, LA.

I'm sure what Abraham experienced was even more brilliant than that. His experience was accompanied by the voice of God, "You can't count them can you? It's impossible." "Abraham, You will have a son, and it is not going to be Eliezer." "That option would mean settling for less than I plan to give you.

God tells him his son will be a legitimate heir. His own offspring. "Count them, that is how many descendants you will have from your own seed. But, you can't count them, can you? There will be more descendants than you can count. I know it seems impossible, but I promise you it is true." And what does it say in verse 6:

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

Why is faith extraordinary? First, the object of our faith is God. He is our shield. He is our very great reward. Secondly, faith is extraordinary because through faith we become right with God.

Why is faith extraordinary?

- 1. The Object of Faith is God**
 - a. He is Our Shield**
 - b. He is Our Very Great Reward**
- 2. Through Faith We Become Right with God**

This verse is one of those pinnacle verses in Scripture. The New Testament quotes it a number of times. Why? Because this verse provides us with a set pattern from Genesis to Revelation for how God saves or justifies humanity. He makes us righteous.

What is righteousness? Well, it is rightness according to a standard. It is rightness measured by a standard. And, who sets that standard? God does! Because he is 100% righteous.

So, God crediting Abraham's faith to him as righteousness means that because Abraham believed God for his promise, God therefore judged that Abraham measured up to the standard based upon God's righteousness.

This is the pattern. No one can have a relationship with God or inherit his promises without this transaction taking place in their life. The Apostle Paul uses Genesis 15:6 to explain salvation by justification (making us right with God). Romans 4:18-25 says,

Romans 4:18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead.

20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,

21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

23 The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

You see the pattern is there again. Righteousness is credited to those who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. Abraham believed God and his promise to give him an heir, a son, a seed. And through this seed would come Jesus Christ, God’s one and only son.

The same pattern is there for us if we have faith in God who gave his one and only son, and his promise that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. When we believe God for that promise, he credits it to us as righteousness. We become right with God. This is the only way to have a relationship with God.

We just had new speakers installed last week because our other ones were damaged by the moisture from the flooding we had during the last hurricane. These speakers are really nice and they were created to produce a really nice sound.

But these speakers won't make a sound and won't do what they were created to do without two other pieces of equipment. The first is the sound board. And, the sound engineer adjusts the sound board for everything to sound right according to his ear. And that entire signal is then sent to the second piece of equipment, the power amplifiers.

Those are backstage. The power amps "power up" and make it possible for the signal from the sound board to come through the speakers. Without the power amps, there is no sound.

In a similar way, God set a standard according to his righteousness. He has mixed the perfect signal of everything that is right and desires to send it to you much like the sound board sends out a signal.

We as humanity are much like these speakers - Created in God's image and designed to function according to his plan. But because of sin we are separated from him, and we can't produce his sound without that being reconciled. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. The payment for sin is death. Without God's righteousness, we are just like dead speakers.

But, there is that other critical component. The power amplifiers. Faith is like the power amplifiers. It is the means by which we are empowered to measure up to meet God's standard. God has set his standard and through faith, by believing in God who raised Jesus from the dead and trusting him for his promise of eternal life, we are made right with him.

When this happens we enter into the relationship that God always intended for us to have. We have life. Our spiritual lives will no longer be dead, but we will be alive and produce the beautiful sound that God brings to our hearts. Without faith you cannot have the righteousness of God credited or imputed to you. And your wage is death.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If by faith you accept this gift of God which is the eternal life that he offers in Christ, then instead of receiving the wage of death for your sin, you will have God himself as your reward.

Many of you have already believed God for his promise of salvation through Jesus Christ. I hope that God's Word has encouraged you today to continue walking in faith.

We have nothing to fear. Fear just introduces competing noises to the sound that God is playing in our hearts.

We can have extraordinary faith because it is placed in our extraordinary God. No danger, no discouragement, no distress can ever overtake us because the same God who covered and provided for Abraham is the same God today - our shield, our very great reward through faith.