

Genesis 15 - The Abrahamic Covenant

Monday, January 20, 2014
10:24 AM

To Read:

1. Exodus 12
2. Romans 4

Introduction

This morning we're going to be in Genesis 15, but first I want to start with an excerpt from a sermon by Tom Keller on Exodus 14:

Somebody says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. You're saved by grace apart from works and your moral effort. But you've got to *believe*, don't you? And you've really got to believe with *all* your heart because salvation is by faith." Don't do that. Do you know what you're doing? Even this text tells us something about that: "The waters were divided and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on there right and on their left" (Ex. 14:21-22). The Israelites all crossed over, but that doesn't mean that they all crossed over with the same disposition. Some walked through marveling at the walls of water: "Wow! Look at that! God is on our side! Eat your heart out, Egyptians! The Lord is fighting for us." Others were probably walking through like this: "I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die, *I'm gonna die!*" Yet they all crossed over. Individual Israelites had different qualities of faith, but they were all equally saved. They were equally delivered. Why? Because you are not saved because of the quality of your faith. You are saved because of the object of your faith: the Redeemer, the God who is fighting for you. Everything about this text says, "Grace, grace, grace. Crossing over is by grace."

I think this is a good example of the principle that I am trying to illustrate through our story of Abraham. The story of Abraham could easily be turned into a lesson on how good our faith has to be - look at Abraham! We need to have faith like Abraham did. And that is true, and that is a desire I have for this series is to see your faith increased. But, we need to stand back and first say, "you are not saved because of the quality of your faith. You are saved because of the object of your faith: the Redeemer, the God who is fighting for you." As I've said several times, I want our first and primary focus in the story of Abraham to be Christ and how he is promised and typified in the story of Abraham.

This is why I've organized the sermons into the questions about promise and response and put the promises first, because I want to highlight that the faith that is called for in Abraham's story is based on the promises that point to Christ. The promise, the object of our faith comes first. This organization worked well in chapter 12, because all of the promises came before all of the responses of faith - so we could see Christ and then we could see how we should imitate Abraham in believing in the promise. In Chapters 13 and 14 we had the same subjects, promise and response, but they were more mixed up. I tried last week to organize it the same way, but because the promises and responses were mixed together, I perhaps confused more than clarified last week. I think that I taught true things last week, but perhaps they weren't as clear as they could have been. I spoke true things out of the Word of God, but perhaps demonstrated especially well that I'm merely a vessel of clay that has been entrusted with great treasure.

So, this week I'm going to do a different organization. I'm still going to have the two topics - promise and faith. And I still want to emphasize promises as the root of faith and not the other way around. But, I'm going to follow the flow of the text this morning. So, what we are going to have is eight statements in four cycles. I'll make a 'Faith is' statement based on Abraham's actions in the text this morning, but I'll follow that immediately with a 'Because Christ is' statement based on God's promises to Abraham. And I want to emphasize the 'because' of that statement. We're starting with faith statements this morning, but that faith is based on what Christ is for us. The strength of our faith is a response to the truth of the promise, not the other way around.

So in Genesis 15, God's covenant with Abraham, I am going to make four of these dual statements - four 'faith is' statements and four 'because Christ is' statements. Since we already contemplated the concept of covenant during our study of Noah, I'm not going to over emphasize the covenantal nature of the text this morning, although it will come up in at least one of our points, but I am going to look at how God's covenant with Abraham was really a promise of Christ and how Abraham's reaction to the covenant is an example of believing the promises of God. So, let's read Genesis 15 together.

I. Faith is looking to God for our reward

Genesis 14:22-24 - *But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share."*

A. Abraham's Actions

1. Abraham refused the reward of man
 - a. He didn't seek what the world could give him
 - b. He didn't seek what he could gain on his own
 - c. He didn't seek what he could grasp now
2. Abraham believed that God could reward
 - a. He believed God would reward him greatly
 - b. He believed God would give him what he could never accomplish
 - c. He believed God would reward him later

B. Our Application

1. There is a real danger of seeking reward from men and not God which is antithetical to faith
 - a. John 12:42-43 - *Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*
2. And Christ commands us clearly to seek reward from God, not men
 - a. Premise: Matthew 6:1 - *"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*
 - b. Matthew 6:2-4 - *"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*
 - c. Matthew 6:5-6 - *"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*
 - d. Matthew 6:16-18 - *"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*
 - e. Conclusion, don't seek good here, seek good there: Matthew 6:19-21 - *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*
3. So faith comes down to believing God will reward better than anything else
 - a. Hebrews 11:6 - *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*
4. When we believe that God will reward, we can walk away from the world's reward
 - a. Because God's reward is better: Luke 12:32-34 - *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*
 - b. And it is more eternal: I John 2:15-17 - *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world---the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions---is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

II. Because Christ is our great reward

Genesis 15:1-5 - *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?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." 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."*

A. God's Promise

1. Fear not - you have not believed in Me for no reason
 - a. Abraham could fear that he had given up something more than God would give him
 - b. Abraham could fear that reprisals would come from his victory and God would not protect Him
 - c. But, God tells him to fear not! Whoever believes in God will not be disappointed!
2. I am your shield - though enemies and obstacles mount I will protect you and My promise until the end
 - a. Abraham was gaining enemies in the world as he rescued Lot
 - b. And Abraham had no visible means of gaining the promise as Sarah was barren
 - c. But God tells him that He will be his shield - God will protect His promises and His people
3. Your reward will be very great - My promise will be a greater reward than anything you have left
 - a. Abraham just walked away from what might have been a big reward - the possessions of Sodom
 - b. But God tells him that his faith is not misplaced, the reward God will give him is better
4. Your own son shall be your heir - My promise will be realized and consummated in your promised offspring
 - a. This becomes the struggle of faith in this section - will Abraham keep believing in the promise of a son
5. Your offspring shall be as numerous as the stars - your offspring will be able to inherit the land
 - a. This is the final answer to the question - what will you give me? A land and a people who can inherit it.

B. Christ's Fulfillment

1. Christ is our reason to 'fear not!' (c.f. Luke 12:32, fear not!)
 - a. Romans 10:9, 11 - *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved... For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."*
 - b. I Peter 2:6-7 - *For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"*
2. Because Christ is our shield
 - a. I John 5:18 - *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.*
3. And because Christ is our great reward
 - a. Through Christ - I Peter 1:3-4 - *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,*
 - b. In Christ - Colossians 3:3-4 - *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*
4. All of this is because Christ is the promised offspring
 - a. Galatians 3:16-18 - *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.*
 - b. Galatians 3:25-29 - *for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

III. Faith is believing God even when the promise seems impossible

Genesis 15:6 - *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

A. Abraham's Actions

1. Abraham believed what God said was true
 - a. Abraham had asked God, "What will you give me?" - a question of struggle, even a tinge of despair
 - b. But, when God answers to affirm His promises, Abraham believed God, he did not continue in despair
2. Abraham believed that the promise of a son would be his reward
 - a. Abraham asked what God would give him, and God said a son who would receive the promise
 - b. So, God wasn't directly giving him the land, but instead a promised son
 - c. Abraham believed that the promised son was his reward, in the end he wouldn't get it, his son would
3. Abraham believed in the promise of a son even when it seemed impossible
 - a. Against the background of this promise, we must remember Sarah's barrenness - to all accounts the promise of God was impossible, Abraham wasn't going to have children
 - b. But, it is in this situation that Abraham believed God, he didn't consider the impossibility of the situation, he consider the power of God to do what He had promised

B. Our Actions

1. The promises of God to us are just as impossible as to Abraham
 - a. We know that salvation in all its aspects is impossible for us
 - i. Matthew 19:25-26 - *When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*
 - b. And the consummation of all of God's promises often seems impossible
 - i. II Peter 3:3-6 - *knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.*
2. So, like Abraham, our faith must begin by trusting in the power of God not the impossibility of the situation
 - a. Romans 4:16-22 - *That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring---not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"---in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."*
3. But not only does our faith start there, it must continue there, looking to God who does the impossible
 - a. Galatians 3:1-9 - *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain---if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith--- just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

IV. Because Christ is our righteousness

Genesis 15:6 - *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

A. God's Promise

1. In the text, the second half of this sentence is not so much a promise as a statement, but it holds significance as a promise of God to Abraham, in fact the undergirding of all His promises to Abraham
 - a. When it says, God counted it to him as righteousness, there is a great substitution going on here
 - b. There is a recognition that Abraham is not righteous enough to merit the promise
 - i. We know this because Abraham spent his life in Ur as a worshipper of false gods
 - ii. We know this because Abraham went to Egypt, because Abraham took Hagar, etc.
 - c. But, in His great mercy, God allows a substitution to take place - instead of Abraham's righteousness, God will take Abraham's faith - when Abraham believes God, God will count it as though Abraham was righteous enough to receive the promises
2. The passage, though, questions God's justice - how can God accept Abraham's faith instead of Abraham's righteousness
 - a. The joy of the passage is a new way to be righteous before God, but the burden is how does God guard His own righteousness?
 - b. The passage begs for a foreign righteousness that will be applied to Abraham - the implied promise of God is that He will accomplish righteousness for Abraham so that Abraham's faith will be accepted

B. Christ's Fulfillment

1. As Abraham was promised righteousness, so are we - Romans 4:1-8 - *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."*
2. And this righteousness is found in Christ, the promised son - Romans 4:22-25 - *That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*
3. Because, in Christ, God can grant righteousness and still be righteous - Romans 3:21-26 - *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it--- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*
4. So Christ is our righteousness - I Corinthians 1:30 - *And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,*
5. And thus Christ is our only hope - Philippians 3:8-9 - *For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith*
6. So, Christ is the answer and the fulfilment of this promise - and it was truly Christ that Abraham believed in
 - a. It is no accident that Abraham believed in the promise of a son when his faith was counted as righteousness - he was believing in the promise of Christ, his faith was substantially the same as ours
 - b. John 8:56 - *Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."*
 - c. God promised Abraham a righteousness that came from outside himself and it is found in Christ

V. Faith is seeking confidence in the words of God

Genesis 15:2-3, 8 - *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?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." ... But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"*

A. Abraham's Actions

1. One thing I note about this passage is that Abraham's faith isn't synonymous with blind capitulation
 - a. When God speaks to Abraham, it wasn't, 'ok, sounds good', instead he's honest about his questions
2. Abraham asks surprisingly direct questions of God, questions that might be construed as a lack of faith
 - a. But, we must control our response by verse 6 in the center of the passage - Abraham believed God
 - b. Somehow these questions are part of Abraham's faith, they don't negate faith, instead they are questions that seek to find confidence in faith through the word of God
 - c. Abraham believed God, but Abraham asked God for confidence in His word - this is an act of belief not of unbelief - so, Abraham asks two questions of God to seek confidence in God's promise to him
3. "What will you give me?"
 - a. To put this question into context, God has just promised Abraham that his reward will be very great, but Abraham is struggling to see how that could be true because he doesn't have an heir
 - b. Abraham realizes that the promise is future, but how can Abraham participate in a future reward without an heir to inherit the land
 - c. Abraham is struggling in faith to understand the promise of God, because the promise of God seems to contradict his current situation with Sarah being barren
 - d. But, what he doesn't do is ignore the promise, instead he asks God to reveal the promise to Him again
 - e. When Abraham doesn't understand the promise, he asks God to reveal it to him in a bigger way
4. "How am I to know?"
 - a. The interesting thing about this question is that it appears, again, to be a question of unbelief - Abraham doesn't know, but it comes right after the statement that Abraham believed God
 - b. So, Abraham's desire to be assured is not an act of unbelief but happens in Abraham's belief
 - c. Abraham isn't doubting or challenging God's promise, what he's doing is asking God to confirm the promise to him, in fact, you might say he's asking God to increase his faith
5. So, Abraham's questions might be construed as disbelief, but we must see how they actually express faith
 - a. Abraham struggles to have confidence in God's word
 - b. And he struggles by asking God to increase his faith, to give him a better vision of the promise

B. Our Actions

1. As I consider Abraham's actions here, I am reminded of the story in Mark 9
 - a. Mark 9:21-24 - *And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood... But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"*
 - b. Like Abraham, the man approached Jesus in faith, not perfect faith, but faith that's honest before God
 - c. And like Abraham, the man calls out to Jesus to help him in his unbelief
2. And Paul prays that God would continue to reveal His power and His promises to the Ephesians
 - a. Ephesians 1:17-19 - *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*
3. So, the New Testament expects us to want to see the promises of God more clearly, like Abraham
 - a. Our faith shouldn't just be an acknowledgement that God has given us promises in Christ
 - b. Our faith should desire to see the promises better and more clearly all the time, to be more assured of the promises of God to us, to be more sure of who Christ is and what He has done for us
 - c. We ought to question God on these things - we ought to come boldly to God in prayer asking Him to reveal Christ to us and to always be making us more sure of the promises in Christ

VI. Because Christ is God's covenant to us

Genesis 15:4-5, 17-21 - *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." ... 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..."*

A. God's Promise

1. In response to Abraham's two questions, God made two promises
2. What will you give me? I will give you a son who will be able to inherit the promise
 - a. Here the promise of a son is a guarantee of the promise of a land
 - b. The promised son is the one who will inherit the land - it is the promised son who is the guarantee of all of God's promises - when Abraham doubts his ability to obtain the promise, the answer is the promised son will obtain the promise on behalf of Abraham
3. How am I to know? I will make a covenant to seal my promise
 - a. Hebrews 6 tells us that God's promise was already perfectly sure - when God promised the son and when God promised the land, those promises were sure to happen
 - b. But, God makes a covenant to confirm His promise to Abraham, to increase his faith

B. Christ's Fulfillment

1. Christ is the promised offspring, the one who is promised to inherit the promises
 - a. Galatians 3:16 - *Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.*
2. And Christ is the one who is worthy to unwrap God's redemptive plan, worthy to inherit the promise
 - a. Revelation 5:1-10 - *Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."*
3. But Christ is not only the promised son who inherits the promise on Abraham's (and our) behalf, he is also the covenant that seals all of the promises of God to us
 - a. Luke 22:14-20 - *And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*
4. Therefore all of God's promises are yes and amen in Christ! Christ is the answer to our questions of faith.
 - a. II Corinthians 1:20 - *For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.*

VII. Faith is resting our confidence in the covenant sacrifice

Genesis 15:7-11 - *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?" 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." And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*

A. Abraham's Actions

1. Continuing with the theme of Abraham's questions, when Abraham questions God with 'How am I to know?' God answers by commanding him to bring a sacrifice
 - a. And Abraham obeyed, he accepted that the answer to his question was the preparation of a sacrifice
 - b. Perhaps Abraham knew from this command that God was going to make a covenant with him, this was probably a well understood precursor to a covenant - but regardless, Abraham knew God was going to confirm His promises to him through the sacrifice that was commanded
2. So, when Abraham needs assurance of the promise, he rests his confidence in the covenant sacrifice
 - a. He didn't keep pressing God for another answer, he rested in the sacrifice
 - b. He held himself to be completely answered in the command God gave him
3. But he didn't just rest in the covenant sacrifice, he earnestly sought the assurance of the covenant sacrifice
 - a. It is interesting that Moses records that birds of prey came down and tried to eat the carcasses - not surprising that the birds of prey came, but surprising that Moses recorded it
 - b. Different commentators say different things about this and many see some sort of word picture here about the history of Israel - maybe they're right, but I have a hard time understanding that perspective or seeing it in the text
 - c. But, I think there is at least one thing we can glean from this statement - Abraham was earnest about the sacrifice, once the sacrifice was prepared he stood over it and waited
 - d. Depending on how you read the text, Abraham may have waited a long time - perhaps all day for God to come and make the covenant
 - e. But Abraham waited and guarded the sacrifice because he was looking to it for assurance from God

B. Our Actions

1. Like Abraham, we must see that all of our hope, all of our confidence is in the covenant sacrifice
 - a. In Christ and His sacrifice, we have confidence that all of the promises of God are true, that God is now reconciled to us, that God looks on us with favor and rejoices over us
 - b. Hebrews 4:14-16 - *Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*
 - c. Hebrews 10:19-22 - *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*
2. If we, like Abraham, seek our confidence in the covenant sacrifice, then we must carefully guard that sacrifice from those who would try to despoil it
 - a. I Timothy 6:20 - *O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you.*
 - b. II Timothy 1:14 - *By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.*
 - c. Jude 3 - *although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*
 - d. We are called over and over to guard the message of Christ that has been entrusted to us, because the message of Christ's sacrifice is our hope - therefore we must guard it against those who would empty it of its power

VIII. Because Christ is our redemption

Genesis 15:12-14 - *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 that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.*

A. God's Promise

1. These three verses probably don't sound at all like a promise of God, or if they are a promise, they're a negative promise - a promise of hardship, captivity, and a great delay in the promises
2. So my question is, why does God insert this into God's covenant with Abraham?
 - a. On the one hand, we could say that these things are true and God was just saying what would happen
 - b. But that doesn't seem to explain why these things are revealed by God and not other things
3. To figure this out, I think we need to look forward to the events that God promises
 - a. The nation of Israel ends up in bondage in Egypt for four hundred years
 - b. But, at the end, God does bring great judgment on the Egyptians and works a great redemption for Israel - the Passover was the final plague of judgment that brought about a great redemption
4. So, here, in the center of the Abrahamic covenant, between the sacrifice and the oath, God points forward to the next picture of redemption
 - a. In effect, God is saying that redemption is a central part of God's covenant with Abraham
 - b. All of the promises that God is making to Abraham will only be one through redeeming the children of Abraham from bondage
 - c. The reason that the 'promise' appears here in the middle of the covenant is that the promise is associated with the sacrifice - Abraham has just finished sacrificing the animals when God speaks this
 - d. The redemption that is going to take place will be focused on a great sacrifice - the Exodus from Egypt was centered on the Passover sacrifice - the sacrifice that both brought judgment on the Egyptians and salvation to the Jews
 - i. Exodus 12:12 - *For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD.*
 - ii. Exodus 12:13 - *The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.*
5. The promise, then, is a promise of redemption
 - a. Although Abraham's offspring will be carried captive, God will redeem them
 - b. And when God redeems them, passing judgment on their captors, He will fulfill all of His promises
 - c. And this redemption will come through a great sacrifice that turns away God's wrath from His people and destroys God's enemies

B. Christ's Fulfillment

1. Christ has brought judgment on the captors of His people
 - a. The Scriptures tell us that because of our sin we have been taken in bondage to Satan and the powers of evil to do their will, but Christ has judged the captors of His people
 - b. Colossians 2:13-15 - *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*
 - c. John 12:31-32 - *Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."*
 - d. Hebrews 2:14-15 - *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.*

2. Christ has redeemed His people from captivity
 - a. To redeem means to buy back - in the gospel it has the connotation of paying the price to rescue God's people from sin and death
 - b. So Christ redeemed us from God's curse - Galatians 3:13-14 - *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us---for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--- so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*
 - c. And from the guilt of sin and the kingdom of the evil one - Colossians 1:13-14 - *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*
 - d. And from the bondage of sin - Titus 2:14 - *looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*
3. So Christ's sacrifice is the redemption at the center of the Abrahamic Covenant, the redemption that holds all of the other promises together

Conclusion

- A. This morning we've seen four responses of faith that Abraham had that were based on four promises of God in Christ
 1. Faith is looking to God for our reward... Because Christ is our great reward
 2. Faith is believing God even when it seems impossible... Because Christ is our righteousness and has earned the promises of God
 3. Faith is seeking confidence in God's word... Because Christ is the inheritor and God's covenant with us
 4. Faith is resting our confidence in the covenant sacrifice... Because Christ is our redemption
- B. So, to return to the introduction, I do want you to have faith like Abraham, I want you to make application of our text this morning
 1. I want you to look to God and not man for reward
 2. I want you to believe God even when it seems impossible
 3. I want you to seek confidence in God's word - to try to understand and see Christ better
 4. And I want you to rest all of your confidence in the covenant sacrifice
- C. But, I only want you to do these things because of what Christ is for us
 1. Your faith must be based on Christ being our reward
 2. Your faith must be based on Christ being our righteousness
 3. Your faith must be based on Christ being our covenant
 4. Your faith must be based on Christ being our redemption
- D. So, strive to see Christ as these things, strive to see Him better as these things and then let your faith run after the one who is all of these for you