

## **"When People Think You're Crazy For Sticking Your Neck Out In Trusting The Promises Of God"**

**Genesis 15:1-6**

**3 March 2024**

Sooner or later, God will bring you into a crisis. Something will happen in your life that you absolutely did not ask for. Some kind of trial, suffering, relational mess, or hardship will barge into your life uninvited. And, in that moment you will have to wrestle with where, and in whom, you will place your trust. You will have to struggle with questions like: *Can God really be trusted right now, in this moment? Can I really give this situation to Jesus? Will He really be true to His promises? What do I do when I can't even see what God is doing or see how He will bring good out of this?*

That's the Christian life. That's discipleship. Learning anew to trust Jesus. And when has that ever gone bad? Let me ask you: When has trusting Jesus ever turned out bad for you? Never, because He's faithful.

And this "messy discipleship" that is our lives is really a great combination when you think about it: *our weakness and foolishness meets His power and wisdom*. What could go wrong? What could go wrong when our weakness and foolishness meets His power and wisdom? Nothing. There is no downside to trusting Jesus. There is no hangover with trusting Jesus. There is no fine print that you regret not reading later. There is no downside to trusting Jesus and taking Him at His word... even when things get really dark- especially when things get really dark.

And so our big idea today is chockfull of Gospel hope-

**YOU CAN TRUST GOD FURTHER THAN YOU CAN SEE HIM.**

I stole that phrase from Matthew Henry's commentary, where he said this-

*The better God is known the more he is trusted. Those who know him to be a God of infinite wisdom will trust him further than they can see him (Job 35:14); those who know him to be a God of almighty power will trust him when creature-confidences fail and they have nothing else to trust to (2 Chr. 20:12); and those who know him to be a God of infinite grace and goodness will trust him though he slay them, (Job 13:15). Those who know him to be a God of inviolable truth and faithfulness will rejoice in his word of promise, and rest upon that, though the performance be deferred and intermediate providences seem to contradict it. Those who know him to be the Father of spirits, and an everlasting Father, will trust him with their souls as their main care and trust in him at all times, even to the end.*

So, no matter what happens in your life-

**YOU CAN TRUST GOD FURTHER THAN YOU CAN SEE HIM.**

When creature comforts fail, you can trust God. When you have nothing else to trust to, you can trust God. When everything in your life seems to contradict His word of promise, you can trust God. And if you haven't figured it out yet, this is basic discipleship. This is Christianity 101. God's people have to learn over and over again that they can trust Him...*even when they can't see Him...even when things don't make sense...even when you're 75 years old and God tells you that your 65 year-old wife is gonna have a baby...even when you have to wait for 25 years to see the promise fulfilled that your 65 year-old wife is gonna have a baby!*

The life of Abram & Co. show us that we can trust Jesus right now, at this moment, all the way to the end of our lives- even though we can't see that far into the future, even though we don't have a picture of what our future holds. And that's what Abram will learn in our passage today. Abram and Co. had to learn to trust what *God* says over what *they could* see. And, so do you and me.

And, it's a lesson that we have to relearn over and over and over and over and over and over and over again. We never grow out of this as God's children. We are always being put in situations where we have to trust God. Always. *Always*. In fact, that's the whole Bible, right!? The Bible is full of story after story after story after story after story of God's people having to trust Him over and over and over and over and over and over and over again. Do we think that it's going to be any different for us? Do we think that somehow we get a pass? I hate to burst your bubble so early in the sermon, but I'm sorry. We don't get a pass. This is discipleship. Messy discipleship. This is Christianity 101. In Genesis. Chapter 15.

Turn there in your Bibles.

LOOK AT VERSE 1...

*After these things the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord Yahweh, 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 Yahweh 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." And he believed Yahweh, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

Recall what we saw last week in chapter 14. Two kings came out to meet Abram in the Valley of Shaveh. Melchizedek blessed Abram, while the king of Sodom wanted to become business partners. Apparently, it was an offer Abram *really could refuse* because he did! He wanted nothing to do with Sodom.

So, after meeting the 2 kings in the valley, Yahweh, the Sovereign Lord, appeared to Abram in a vision at night. Abram was maybe sitting around a fire, thinking about how he needed to shear his sheep, or he was already tucked cozily in his bed, but whatever he was doing, God showed up, and when God shows up at your house, you put on your slippers and bathrobe, and you answer the door. And, that's what Abram did.

What are the first words of Yahweh to Abram? *Fear not*. Not because Abram is afraid of God, because he's not. Abram has other reasons to fear. Remember that Abram just beat up that 4 thug-king alliance back in chapter 14. These guys may be licking their wounds and planning revenge. So, it's no surprise that Abram might be sleeping with one eye open. He's afraid they may come back screaming for vengeance.

So, Yahweh comes to reassure Abram's heart. He says that He is Abram's *shield*. The Hebrew word is *magen* and it's the same word that Melchizedek used in Genesis 14:20 when he said that Yahweh had *delivered* Abram's enemies into his hand. Yahweh is the shield, the one who protects Abram and delivers his enemies into his hand. Comforting words after you just picked a fight with a 4 thug-king alliance!

But, Yahweh also tells Abram that his reward will be very great. Yes, Abram spurned the spoils of war. He missed out on a lot of sheep and oxen and donkeys and camels. But, what he would receive from Yahweh was far better: land and descendants as numerous as the stars!

All of this is vintage Yahweh. For one, He speaks! Never get over that. Never get over the fact that we serve a God who speaks to us in His word. I don't think we marvel enough at that. I don't think we're near as awestruck as we should be when we consider that Jesus speaks to us. Just tuck that wonderful truth into your heart and think about it later this week.

But, we also see vintage Yahweh here because He rushes in, to comfort Abram's heart. This is what God does for His people. Jesus comes to comfort us because He knows our hearts. He knows that we are prone to fear, prone to anxiety, prone to worry, prone to despair. Think about how gracious and kind our God is to come to us when our hearts are breaking, and fears cause us to toss and turn in bed, and when we pace the floor, and chew our fingernails, and want to pull out our hair, and we want to scream...and when we just want to die.

Genesis 15 is in the Bible so that you would know that your God loves you and cares about you and sees everything that is going on in your life. He comes to Abram. He initiates the promise. He comes to strengthen Abram. When Abram is weak, God comes to calm his fears.

The voice of Yahweh calms and settles the fears of our hearts. That's juts how the promises of God work. They enter a messy or difficult or crazy situation and they do their thing. The promises of God have a way of keeping you from jumping off the ledge. The promises of God have a way of keeping you from calling it quits. The promises of God have a way of keeping you from losing your mind. That's all vintage Yahweh stuff right there.

Yahweh is going to protect Abram and keep His promises, but there's just one little problem though. I'll let Abram tell you as he tells God about the one little problem.

LOOK AT VERSE 2...

*But Abram said, "O Lord Yahweh, 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."*

The problem with all this talk of descendants and land- from Abram's perspective - is that he has no kids! There are no *Lego* pieces to step on in Abram's house. There are no 3 year-old *McDonald's* French fries still intact under the seats of his mini-van. He has no kids! All he has is a servant named Eliezer of Damascus. Of course, this was common in the ancient Near East. Childless parents could adopt a son to be the heir. So, Eliezer was in line to do just that.

What's interesting is that Abram uses the Hebrew word *hinneh* in verse 3, which means "behold, look, see." This word is used throughout the Old Testament to invite people into a scene and to observe and look at something. So, Abram is saying, *"Come here, Lord, and get a look at this. See? I'm childless. You have given me no kids! Look, there's no Legos on the floor for me to step on!"*

But, then the narrator turns around in verse 4 and uses the exact same word *hinneh* for us, the audience! Abram says, *"Come here and look at this! I have no kids!"* And the narrator says to us, *"Come here and look at this! The word of Yahweh came to Abram!"* He's saying, *"Y'all come here and look at this. Abram just told Yahweh that He has given him no kids. And, now, Yahweh is gonna speak to Abram. Come here. Look!"* We're supposed to enter into the scene and watch.

So, how does Yahweh respond to Abram's words? He told him that Eliezer would not be the one and that Abe would have a kid. The Hebrew is *"what will come out of your own loins will be your heir."* There will be no adopting. Abram and Sarai will have a baby the old-fashioned way. Of course, they will have to wait, and by wait, I mean wait 25 years. Yowza.

But, notice this: Yahweh responds to Abram, not with shame, but with reassurance! I love that! Notice how tender and kind the heart of Yahweh is to Abram! Abram is doubting. He is fearful. Yes, he just had a major victory. Yes, he just shared a covenant meal with the king of Salem. Yes, he saw prayers answered in real time because he refused fellowship with the king of Sodom, and yet here he is again: fearful, scared, doubting God's promises, not understanding why things are happening, and yet how does God appear to him? He's kind. He's gentle. He's tender. He doesn't shame Abram for feeling this way. He doesn't condemn him, doesn't chastise him, doesn't discipline him for his fears. He comes in, and He comforts him.

This is the heart of Yahweh. This is the heart of Jesus. This is the heart of God: it's assurance, it's reassurance. It's recalibrating our hearts when we're scared, when we're fearful. Jesus doesn't come in and say, *"Shame on you for not believing my promises."* He comes and He reiterates His promises. He doesn't preface His promises with a *"Shame on you,"* or an, *"I can't believe your faith is so weak."* He just comes in and He repeats the promise again to reassure Abram's heart... because this is the kind of God that He is. He loves to see His people believe His promises. He loves to see their hearts reassured about His character and who He is- because He is for us.

There is no, *"Shame on you!"* There is no, *"How dare you?"* There is no, *"Why can't you just believe my promises for once?"* There is no, *"Do I need to hit you upside the head with the 2x4 promise?"* None of that. Instead, there's care. There's concern. There's reassurance.

God understands that 75 year-old Abram is trying to make sense of all of this baby talk. When Abram questions Yahweh, it is faith. It's faith because Abram is crying out to Yahweh, the God of the universe.

Understand this: Crying out to the Lord, questioning Him, pouring your heart out, yelling at Him (with respect!) *is* faith- because you're crying out, questioning, pouring your heart out, yelling (with respect!) to the God of the universe. You are crying out to the only God who can do anything about the situation that you're in. That's faith! Sometimes faith screams. Sometimes faith yells. Sometimes faith questions God. Sometimes faith scratches its head.

Listen, faith doesn't always understand. In fact, I would say, maybe faith rarely understands. Faith doesn't understand how God is moving, why God is moving, what His plan is, how He will intervene, how He will answer a prayer. Faith doesn't understand many of these things, but it still hangs on because of the character of God, because of the promises of God. So, it's okay for faith to be confused. It's okay for faith to be weak. It's okay for faith to question- as long as that faith is looking to the God of the promise. It's *weak faith* in a *strong Savior*. That's discipleship.

I mean just the fact that Jesus said in John 14 that He was going away and would send the Holy Spirit, the Helper, implies that your faith is going to be weak, and that you need *help*. The sending of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is proof that your faith is going to be weak. Proof that your faith is going to be confused. Proof that your faith is going to question. Proof that you need someone outside of you, someone outside of your faith, in order for you to make it.

So, the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life is proof that God knows your faith will be weak. God knows you will struggle. God knows that you will be confused. God knows that you will question. And that's why He sends the Helper, the Holy Spirit to help weak sinners, whose faith is weak, who scratch their head, and who chew their fingernails, and who toss and turn in their beds at night, and who want to pull their hair out, and who, maybe even want to just end it all.

Did you notice that verse 2 is the first time that Abram speaks to Yahweh in the book of Genesis?! What does Abram do? He questions Yahweh, questions the promise. He questions Yahweh's word. *"How is this gonna be? How is this real?"* I love that. The first thing in Scripture that Abram says to Yahweh is 1) What will you give me 'cause I have no kids, and 2) You have given me no kids. It's like Abram is saying, *"If you want to give me a reward, give me a gift, how about a kid?"*

I love that Yahweh allows Abram to question him. I love that Yahweh doesn't strike him down, but allows this kind of dialogue.

Listen, faith asks questions. Faith is inquisitive. Faith wants to know. Faith has a dialogue with the God of the universe. Abram, from his very limited perspective, asked how it is possible that they would have a kid. He just straight up says to God, *"Yo! What's up? How is this gonna go down?"*

He was real with God. And, you can do this too! You can question God. You can ask Him questions. You can tell Him that you're confused. You can tell Him that you don't understand how it's possible that something will work out. You can tell Him that you just don't see it. You can tell Him that it doesn't make sense. You can tell Him that you can't seem to put the pieces of the puzzle together, that you can't see the picture. The full picture. He will allow you to do that. Isn't that wonderful? I don't think we marvel at that enough!

It's true-

**YOU CAN TRUST GOD FURTHER THAN YOU CAN SEE HIM.**

So, how does Yahweh respond to Abram's questions?

LOOK AT VERSE 5...

*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." And he believed Yahweh, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

In verse five, God gives Abram a very visible, tangible sign. He tells him to look up at the stars, which in the country without all the lights of the city, you can only imagine how lit up the sky was every single night. Abram could look up at the stars, and say, *"Yes! This is what my descendants are going to be like."* How caring of God in giving Abram a very simple picture that he didn't have to manufacture up for himself every day, but every night, as he laid his head down on his pillow, he could look up at the stars, and say, *"Yahweh is going to keep His promise to me."*

Ralph Davis says, *"Well, in the star-sign, God is giving Abram a colored picture, a visual aid to assist his faith. Yahweh does not do this to make his promises more sure (how could that ever be done!) but to make you more sure of his promises. He gives you props to support your faith, gives you some crutches on which faith can go on walking."*

So, Abram counted the stars, or tried, - *and he believed* - and Yahweh counted it to him as righteousness. The Hebrew word translated here as "believed" is probably better translated as "trusted" (see Bruce Waltke, *Genesis*, p. 242). The word occurs here in a Hebrew verbal stem (Hiphil) and takes on a declarative sense, "to consider something reliable or dependable" (see *NET Bible*).

You could word it this way: *Abram trusted Yahweh and considered His promise as reliable.* That gets to the deeper meaning. It isn't just mere "belief." It's trust. It's saying that God's word, God's promise is reliable and can be depended upon.

Abram believed and God credited it to him as righteousness. It's not that Abram is righteous in and of himself. We know he's not! He'll prove it again and again as the story continues. Yahweh is *crediting* righteousness to Abram here. Obviously, the apostle Paul will pick up on this verse in Romans 4 when he speaks about justification by faith. In the record of Heaven, all those who trust in Christ alone are credited and reckoned righteous. It's a done deal. That's the hope of the Gospel. It's secure.

So, Abram simply believed God's word, he simply believed God's promises. That, of course, doesn't mean that Abram never had questions. it doesn't mean that he never doubted. It doesn't mean that he didn't lay in bed at night and wonder, *"How is my 65-year-old wife going to get pregnant?"* It doesn't mean that Abram didn't look up at the stars at night, and sometimes be full of doubt and fear? What it means is that Abram simply believed God's promise. He simply trusted that God's word was reliable. Even though he had questions, even though he had doubts, even though he had fears, he just simply said, *"I believe this is true, even if I don't understand, even if I'm full of questions, even if I wonder how?"*

That's faith. Faith is not afraid to live with questions. Faith is not afraid to ask questions. Faith is okay with not being in the know. Faith is okay with sitting in the dark. Faith is okay with scratching its head. Faith is okay wondering. Faith is okay staring at the stars and seeing thousands upon thousands in the sky and wondering, *"How? How is this gonna happen? I'm 75. She's 65. How?"* Faith is okay reading the book *What To Expect When You're Expecting At Age 90.*

Listen, no matter how confused you may ever be about your life and what God is doing-

**YOU CAN TRUST GOD FURTHER THAN YOU CAN SEE HIM.**

You can trust Him *even when you can't see Him...even when things don't make sense.*

And, that means that you can trust God further than you can see Him right now. You can't see into the future, you can't see what God is doing right now, but you can trust Him further than you can see Him.

Wouldn't it be great to be able to see every event in our lives? We all want that at some point in our lives, right? We want to know what our future holds. But it doesn't work like that usually. We do know from God's word where history is headed, but in our day-to-day lives, we don't know some things that we would like to know. And that's when we have to trust. We are a people of *faith* after all, right? We ask people to *trust* in Jesus when we evangelize, right? So, from the very beginning of you becoming a Christian, you had to trust, you had to have faith.

And, that's what you will have to do every day for the rest of your life. We are a people of *faith*. We trust. We don't leave trust behind once we believe. Following Jesus as a disciple is nothing but trust! Always trusting in Him, trusting in His word, trusting in the Spirit to do His work.

So, God is saying something like this to us, in the middle of all of our uncertainties, *"You won't always understand me, you won't always 'get' what I'm doing, or know what I'm up to, but you can always trust Me. I'm trustworthy-always. And if I just so happen to surprise you with some impossible situation that seems hopeless, then I will also surprise you with the joy that I'll bring out of that impossible situation. Oh, and by the way, in case you forgot, I specialize in impossible situations. So, why don't you just cast your cares on Me. I got this, okay?"*

That's the Christian life right there. That's discipleship. Learning anew to trust Jesus. Ray Ortlund said, *"If no one ever thinks we're crazy for the way we stick our necks out in trusting the promises of God, are we really living by faith?"*

If no one ever thinks we're crazy for the way we stick our necks out in trusting the promises of God, are we really living by faith? If no one scratches their head when they hear about how much peace we have when troubles come our way, if no one scratches their head when they hear about how calm we are in the face of hardship, if no one scratches their head when they hear about how we are simply trusting Jesus when all of our creature comforts fail, are we really living by faith?

And, what better place to trust God and stick our necks out in trusting His promises than when we celebrate the Lord's Supper? It is here that we feed on Christ by what? By faith! By trust! All that God is for us in His Son we find when we come to this table.

We come to this table and we're sticking our necks out in faith and trusting in what Jesus has done for us. We're sticking our necks out and trusting that He lived a perfect life for us. We're sticking our necks out and trusting that He died a brutal, bloody death on the cross for our sins. We're sticking our necks out and trusting that God raised Him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. We're sticking our necks out and trusting that His love never fails...even if we do, even *when* we do. And, trust that when your weakness and foolishness meets His power and wisdom, then nothing can go wrong.

So, as we come to the table today, stick your neck out and trust the promises of God. Trust that the sins that you can't seem to forget, Jesus can't remember. And because you're so prone to forget it, and I'm so prone to forget it, God gave us a little meal to remind us. To remind us that He keeps His promises and we can trust Him.

We can't see into the future, and we don't know what the coming year will be like. But, what we can do is look at this table. This table reminds us of something that happened in the past, when Jesus gave Himself for our sins. The innocent for the guilty.

You can trust a God who does something like that for you, right?

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"When People Think You're Crazy For Sticking Your Neck Out In Trusting The Promises Of God"

Genesis 15:1-6

Sermon Study Questions

1. READ Genesis 15:1-6. What do we learn about God here? What do we learn about discipleship?

2. Discuss what Matthew Henry said: *The better God is known the more he is trusted. Those who know him to be a God of infinite wisdom will trust him further than they can see him (Job 35:14); those who know him to be a God of almighty power will trust him when creature-confidences fail and they have nothing else to trust to (2 Chr. 20:12); and those who know him to be a God of infinite grace and goodness will trust him though he slay them, (Job 13:15). Those who know him to be a God of inviolable truth and faithfulness will rejoice in his word of promise, and rest upon that, though the performance be deferred and intermediate providences seem to contradict*

*it. Those who know him to be the Father of spirits, and an everlasting Father, will trust him with their souls as their main care and trust in him at all times, even to the end.*

3. Discuss this thought from the sermon:

*God understands that 75 year-old Abram is trying to make sense of all of this baby talk. When Abram questions Yahweh, it is faith. It's faith because Abram is crying out to Yahweh, the God of the universe. Understand this: Crying out to the Lord, questioning Him, pouring your heart out, yelling at Him (with respect!) is faith- because you're crying out, questioning, pouring your heart out, yelling (with respect!) to the God of the universe. You are crying out to the only God who can do anything about the situation that you're in. That's faith! Sometimes faith screams. Sometimes faith yells. Sometimes faith questions God. Sometimes faith scratches its head.*

4. READ Genesis 15:6. Why is it better to translate it as "trusted" instead of "believed"?

5. Discuss what Ray Ortlund said: *"If no one ever thinks we're crazy for the way we stick our necks out in trusting the promises of God, are we really living by faith?"* Where do you need to stick your neck out and trust Jesus right now?

6. Discuss what Ralph Davis said: *"Well, in the star-sign, God is giving Abram a colored picture, a visual aid to assist his faith. Yahweh does not do this to make his promises more sure (how could that ever be done!) but to make you more sure of his promises. He gives you props to support your faith, gives you some crutches on which faith can go on walking."*