



Good morning Central Peninsula Church! It's fun to have both campuses together at one location for three services! And since everyone got an extra hour of sleep, you should be feeling great! Besides, I just want all you to know that this week, most of our church staff went to the Giants parade on Wednesday, but poor me, stayed in my office so that I could work on this sermon! Don't you feel sorry for me?

This morning I want to talk about trust. The video we just viewed asked three questions: what does it mean to trust someone, who can you trust, and what do you do when trust is broken? It's an important topic. The Christian life is all about trust, isn't it? The issue we face on a daily basis is this: are we going to trust the Lord or are we going to trust ourselves and take matters into our own hands? When you boil it down, the question is even more significant—is God trustworthy? That is the question Abram deals with in Genesis 15.

### God's Presence and Promise

**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." And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness (verses 1–6).**

Abram had just finished rescuing his nephew Lot from the hands of several mighty kings. Then suddenly the word of the Lord comes to Abram in a vision. We are not told what Abram saw, instead we get to eavesdrop on his conversation with God. God tells him, "*Fear not, Abram...*" All through the Bible when God appears to people, their reaction is fear and trembling in the mighty, awesome, and holy presence of God. Later in Genesis 17, Abram would fall flat on his face in the presence of Almighty God. But God says, "Fear not." Abram had a lot to fear, didn't he? He was worried about the kings he met in battle and feared their retaliation. But Abram also feared his future. He was faced with a

situation that seemed impossible. In Genesis 12, God had promised to bless Abram with a great name, a powerful nation, many children, and of course land. Years had passed and Abram was an old, tired, childless, wanderer without any place to call home. How would God come through on his promises? Could God be trusted? Or would Abram take matters into his own hands?

My guess is that many of you are asking the same questions this morning. Maybe there is something going on in your marriage, with your children, with your health, with your finances, or with your family, and you are wondering, can I trust God with this? Will he come through for me? Like Abram, you are looking at the promises of God and comparing them to your reality and you see a huge disconnect. God promises me abundant life. Where is it? God promises to provide for me. We're broke. God promises to be my great physician. I'm really sick. If you have ever doubted God and have been tempted to take matters into your own hands, you are in good company with Abram.

I want you to notice that God calms Abram's fear by giving him three pictures of trust—a shield, a reward, and the stars. God tells Abram first, "*I am your shield.*" God reminds Abram that the war was won not because of Abram's might, but because the Lord protected him. I am your shield. God promises to protect Abram from his enemies, and there will be many more. Like a shield protects a warrior, I'll protect you. The Psalms in multiple verses describe God as our protecting shield. Psalm 3:3 declares, "*But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.*" Ephesians 6, which describes the whole armor of God, tells us, "*In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.*" If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, through faith, God is your shield. We can trust the God who protects his people. Does this mean nothing bad will ever happen to you? Absolutely not. We live in a fallen world, lead by the enemy of our souls, where pain and suffering are part of the course. We'll be wounded in battle, but our pain will only be temporary. I've often wondered what things God has protected me and my family from that I didn't see and will never know. Have you ever thought about that? We can trust God because he is our shield, Jesus is protecting us. We also have a reward.

Abram can trust the Lord because he promises, "*your reward shall be very great.*" At the end of the battle, earlier in chapter 14, Abram meets with the king of Sodom and Melchizedek, the

king of Salem, who was also a priest of God. The king of Sodom offered Abram the goods and plunder from the battle. But surprisingly, Abram turns it down and takes nothing. In light of that, God promises to provide for Abram. God says that "I am your reward." Abram needed to be reminded that his reward will not only be land and descendants, but the very presence of God. I am your reward. How often is it that we want things from God, but not God himself? We want him to bless us and answer our prayers, but for the believer, our greatest reward is the presence of Jesus himself. Nothing compares. He is more than enough. I am your shield. I am your reward.

In response to all this Abram, for the first time, speaks to God. What we see here is a man struggling with his faith. He asks, "Where is the land and the son you've promised, God? Has all this trouble and hardship been for nothing? How can you allow one of my slaves to inherit everything?" Have you ever struggled with your faith? Have you ever had a few nagging doubts? Abram, the man of faith, had a few doubts, too. When I first became a follower of Jesus, I had tons of questions! all throughout my Christian life, I've found answers to my questions, but guess what, I've also gathered more questions about God. Mature faith is not free of doubt. Mature faith is as one theologian phrased it, "Faith seeking understanding." Faith is big enough for doubt. Abram was not walking away **from** God; he was taking his doubt **to** God. Like the father who brought his mute child to Jesus in Mark 9 (*The Message*) and confessed, "***I believe, help me with my doubts.***" Do you ever feel that way? Abram was saying, "God, I don't understand, help me understand and trust you." If you are a new Christian and you have some doubts, take them to the Lord. Search the Bible for answers. Grab a pastor, an elder, or your Christian friend and ask them your questions. The sign of mature faith is struggling with doubt but seeking understanding. How does God respond to Abram's doubts? He gives him a third illustration of trust, the stars.

Like a father putting his arm around his son, God takes Abram outside and says, look up, count the stars, that is how many descendants you will have. When we lived in Las Vegas, we would often travel to Utah to hike, camp, and fish. Many times on the way back from those trips we would find ourselves driving at night in the middle of the desert on a two lane highway. One of the things I would love to do is turn off our headlights so that we could soak in the stars as we drove. Because Las Vegas was so bright with lights, we seldom got to see stars. But out in the middle of the desert, the stars were breathtaking. Here is Abram, in the desert, surrounded by millions of stars. God tells him, that these stars will be a constant reminder of God's promises to him. The promise was given to Abram but it affects us all. God's promise is for everybody, for all peoples, languages and tribes. The promise to Abram was to bring him a son, then another son, then another son, until the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is born.

If your trust is placed in the Lord, you are a child of Abraham. Today there are over one billion people that claim to be Christians. When you include everyone from history that has ever believed in Jesus Christ, that is a lot of people, too many to count, just like the stars. When Abram struggles in his faith, when we struggle in ours, all we have to do is look up to be reminded of the Sovereign Creator that is absolutely trustworthy. In fact, I thought it would be fun for just a second to look up at the stars. Just for a moment, let's turn down the lights and put up the picture of the stars. Listen to the word of the Lord. I am your shield. I will protect you. I am your reward. I will provide. I can be trusted. I created every single one of those stars by my word. You will receive the Promised Land. You will have a son. Trust me.

In response Abram in verse 6, "***believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.***" It is an understatement to say that this is one of the most important verses in the entire Bible. It is quoted in Romans 4, Galatians 3, and James 2, but its impact is all over the Bible. What sets apart the Christian faith from all other religions is this verse. The doctrine of justification by faith did not originate from the Apostle Paul. It's not a New Testament idea. It came from Genesis. Abram "believed." That word is in the perfect tense which means a completed action done in the past and continued in the future. A better translation of the word is "trust." Abram trusted God and continued to trust God. God's response to Abram's trust is that he "counted," reckoned, regarded, or credited his trust as righteousness. Abram was made right with God, justified, by faith in God. Abram trusted God's promise and his word and God made him righteous. Don't forget, Abram came from a pagan family and was far from perfect. But God, in his love and mercy, chose Abram to be the father of all who believe in Jesus Christ. Abram was saved by faith; we are saved by faith.

When I first became a Christian one of the questions I had was, "How were people in the Old Testament saved?" The answer is, in the same way we are saved. Salvation comes only through faith. Both under the old covenant and the new covenant, faith brings righteousness and salvation. Abram, like everyone before him and after him, was looking forward to Jesus, the Messiah. When I was 17 years old, I heard clearly the truth of the Gospel. God was already working in my life, drawing me to himself, even giving me the faith to believe. I placed my trust in Jesus Christ alone and at the moment God declared me righteous and acceptable in his sight. I did nothing to earn it. I do not deserve it. I am humbled and thankful that in God's sight I am holy, clean, and righteous. Abram, "believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness."

We can trust God because of his presence as our shield and our reward. We can trust God because of his promises by simply

looking up at the stars. Finally, we can trust God because of the covenant.

## He is the God of the Covenant

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. 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. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." 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, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites" (verses 7–21).

Here we find Abram, still struggling in his faith asking God, "How am I to know that I shall possess it?" In other words, can I fully trust you God and your promises to give me land and a son? God answers Abram with a covenant. In the ancient world, when two parties made a promise or a covenant, they didn't sign legal papers or get a notary, they performed a covenantal ceremony. In this ceremony, animals would be cut in half, just like it says here, and each party making the covenant would walk between the bloody body of the animals. In essence each party was saying, "If I break my word, may a curse fall on me and may I die like these animals." This was an intense deal. The word for covenant literally means in Hebrew, "to cut a covenant." We really do not have any modern day equivalent of this type of covenant. It's true, marriage is like a covenant, but no one is forced to die when their marriage falls apart. You just hire a good lawyer, fill out the paperwork, and see a judge. When you buy a house, you fill out tons of paperwork and promise to pay the bank back, but you can get out of that agreement by a short sell or foreclosure. A

blood covenant was something completely different. I want you to notice two things about God's covenant with Abram.

In verse 11, birds of prey come down and attack the carcasses. These symbolically represent nations that will come against Israel as they enter the Promised Land. Then in verses 12-16 the Lord describes to Abram the terrible future events Israel will endure at the hands of the Egyptians. What is being described here is what the book of Exodus is all about. The point Moses, the author of Genesis, is making is this, there will always be opposition to the covenant. There is always opposition to God's plans. If you are in a marriage, know that there will be opposition. God wants us to fight for our marriages. If you are a follower of Christ, there will be opposition. There is always opposition to God's plans. This is why it is so important to trust God with our lives. He is our shield. He is our reward. He will come through on his promises. But there will be opposition. I want you to see a second truth about the covenant here.

In verses 12-21, something amazing happens. When the sun went down, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passes between the severed animal pieces. What's that all about? The smoke and the fire both represent the awesome presence of the Lord. God himself, not Abram, passes through the sacrifice. This is unbelievably significant. The Lord swears by himself that his promise is certain. If he does not come through, he will die, and guess what, God can't die. He is saying to Abram, "I commit myself fully to you and your descendants." Abram never passes through the animals. God's covenant is not based on Abram's performance or obedience. God's covenant and God's promises are certain because he does not go back on his word. Salvation, grace, and faith are all dependent on God, not us! We are in a secure relationship. We are in a covenantal relationship. Covenant is God's language for relationship and intimacy. We can fully trust God because he keeps his promises, he is the God of the covenant.

Many years later, the chosen seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ, would be born. He would usher in a new covenant. He would live a sinless life. Jesus would be beaten and his bloodied body would be hung on a cross. He would take the curse of breaking the covenant fully on himself. Through his death and resurrection, our covenant-breaking sins, have once and for all been atoned for. There is no longer any need to sacrifice animals. Jesus was the ultimate and final sacrifice and bore the punishment for our sins so that we don't have to. God has poured out the Holy Spirit on all his people and written his law on our hearts. This new covenant is the eternal covenant in Christ. Through Jesus we have fellowship with God, he is our God and we are his people forever. When your faith is doubting, go to the cross, go to Jesus, remember the sacrifice.

## Conclusion

Preaching about trusting God is much easier than living that way. One of the areas that I've been struggling to trust God in is with the future of my children. I want more than anything else for them to know and love Jesus. I believe that as a parent that is my number one responsibility, to pass on my faith to them. We read them the Bible often, we pray with them and for them, we make sure they are very involved with our church. We are doing our best to raise them in the wisdom and instruction of the Lord. But, in the past two weeks I've found myself worrying a lot about their future. Worrying that they would not embrace the faith or fall away from it. Worrying that they will make bad decisions. I totally understand why some families move to Texas and buy a compound in the middle of nowhere. It's safe. As I worked through this text, the Lord gently spoke to me and said, "You need to trust me with your children." It's so much easier to take matters into my own hands and try to control the situation.

In two weeks, Shawn and I will be preaching on the sacrifice of Isaac. We are going to learn a lot more about trusting God with our kids! So in closing, let me ask you, what area, in what situation, in what circumstance, do you need to trust God? I would encourage you to memorize Genesis 15:6 and spend some time journaling and praying to the Lord this week about that one area of doubt.

God is trustworthy. He is our shield. He is our reward. His promises will come true, just look at the stars. We can trust God with our salvation because he has made us righteous by faith. We can trust God because he never goes back on his word, he is the God of the covenant.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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