

The Promise-Making, Promise-Keeping God

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[0:00] This is a prayer of illumination by Huldrych Wangelley, one of the fathers of the Reformation. Imagine that you're 18 years old.

Do we actually have any 18-year-olds out there? We're going to have a lot of them soon. Tim raised his hand. Not buying it, Tim. Imagine with me that you're 18 years old, you've just graduated from high school, you've just been accepted to UConn, and all summer you've been nervously excited for the start of your first semester at college.

You've been making a checklist of the things you're going to need to pack, you've been thinking about all the work that it's probably going to entail to get your degree and do well in your classes. And then, early August, you go to get the mail, and there is a USPS priority package, and you open it up, and to your surprise, it's a diploma.

It has conferred you with a bachelor's degree on behalf of UConn. Now you've done none of the coursework, you haven't even packed yet for college. But now you have in your hands a bachelor's degree.

How would you feel in that moment? How would you feel? Now some of you would be pumped, some of you would be thrilled, not surprised Jordan. Some of you would be thrilled.

[1:42] I went to college with Jordan, so I, some context there. I suspect that even Jordan, I suspect all of us would at least feel some measure of disappointment.

Like maybe even outrage, maybe a sense of injustice. How could UConn give me a bachelor's degree? I did, I did nothing to earn this. I did nothing to deserve this.

Other students have labored for four years. They earned 120 credit hours of classes to get their degrees. Like how could this, how could this be? Now the thing is, I think perhaps it's the same feeling that prevents many from receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because the gospel says that you don't need to do any work to receive salvation. In fact, the work has already been done on your behalf. And in fact, any work that you do perform is worthless. It contributes nothing. It's not going to help. You can only receive it as a gift of grace by faith in Jesus Christ. Now this message offends many.

[2:50] Yet it is the message, the only message the Bible declares of everlasting life. And it's this gospel message that is being proclaimed in seed form here in Genesis 15.

And so if you haven't already, please turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 15. The title of the sermon today is The Promise-Making, Promise-Keeping God.

Now we've titled the whole series The Life-Giving, Promise-Keeping God. And this Promise-Keeping God, we're going to see over and over and over again, especially right here in Genesis chapter 15. And the main point, it's already up there, is that righteousness is a gift given to those who trust in the promise-making, promise-keeping God.

Righteousness is a gift given to those who trust in the promise-making, promise-keeping God. Now we're going to work through this passage in three sections today.

And here is the first section. The seed promise questioned and confirmed. First five verses. Look in your Bibles. Genesis 15 chapter 1.

[3:53] Now just pause there.

That the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision is setting him apart as a prophet of God. This is the only time this phrase appears in the book of Genesis. Abram is acting as a prophet in this chapter.

Now we don't know exactly the interplay between vision and then real life experience, because clearly in this chapter there are some things actually happening physically. But God is speaking.

God is revealing truth to his prophet Abram. And God says, Fear not, Abram. I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great.

Mark, that's the... God comforts and confirms the promise based on his nature. Now these first two words spoken here for the very first time in Scripture and in Genesis will become the most often repeated command in all of Scripture.

[4:59] Fear not. Fear not. But these words, really, they're less of a command. They're less of an imperative. And they're more a word of comfort. Are they not?

It's like Jesus, what we were reading earlier, it's like Jesus saying, Do not be anxious. Is it a command? Well, yes, on the one hand. But he's speaking words of comfort. God's saying to Abram, Abram, I see you.

Abram, I love you. I'm pleased by your faith, son. You boldly faced, in chapter 14, you boldly faced those tyrant kings for the sake of your nephew. And now maybe you're afraid they're going to retaliate.

You rejected Sodom's offer of earthly pleasures to wait on my promises. Maybe now you're worried that that was a poor choice. Fear not, child, God is saying. And why should Abram not fear?

Because God says, I am your shield. This is who I am to you. I am the one who delivered the enemy into your hand.

[5:57] As Melchizedek said last week, I'm watching over you. I'm protecting you. I'm keeping your life in my mighty hands. And as I've promised, God is saying, so I will say to you again, your reward shall be very great.

In other words, you made the right choice, rejecting Sodom's offer, to wait on the blessing that I have promised to you. The pleasures at my right hand are infinitely more than the pleasures that Sodom can give to you.

You will indeed be blessed through me. And God speaks this word of comfort and this confirmation based on his own nature, his own character. And I just want to pause and say, is God not speaking the exact same words over his children this morning?

Fear not, child. I am your shield. I am the one protecting you, the one watching over, the one keeping your going in and your going out forevermore.

Your reward shall be very great. Children of God, in this life and then infinitely more in the life to come. And the blood of Jesus Christ testifies to these things.

[7:03] His resurrection proves these things. God is saying to us this morning, fear not. Now we believe these things, saints, don't we? And yet we struggle to believe these things, don't we?

And so does Abram. Verse 2, 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 shall be my heir. Abram questions God's promise. It's like, I hear you, Lord.

I trust you, Lord. But the physical evidence that's in front of me does not seem to jive with your promise. You've told me I'm going to be a great nation.

You told me I'm going to have offspring like the dust of the earth, but I ain't getting any younger here. Abram's 75 years old, somewhere in between 75 and 85. Yeah, 75 and 85.

[8:04] His next chapter, we're going to find out. It's been 10 years. So he's not young. He's saying, I'm not getting any younger. My wife is still barren, and my servant right now, not a son of my, of my, you know, a biological son.

A servant is my heir. So this is, this is an, I believe, help my unbelief kind of moment. Do you know what I'm talking about? Do you know that story in the Gospels?

In Mark chapter 9, a man brings his demon-possessed son to the disciples, and they're unable to heal him. And then Jesus comes on the scene, and the man's like, your disciples couldn't heal him. And the man says, if you can do anything, to Jesus, 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. You know, this side of heaven, we are always a mixture of faith and unbelief. As with Abram, life is a journey of faith tests that God intends to strengthen our faith, but our faith is not going to be perfected until the day when faith becomes sight at the return of Christ.

[9:16] And so even Abram, whose faith has now been blossoming over the last few chapters of Genesis, he's wrestling to more fully believe still the promises of God.

But I do have a question for us. Abram doubts the promises of God, but where does he go with his doubts? Where does he go?

To God. Oh, Lord God. He takes his lament straight to the throne room of Almighty God.

And this itself is an act of faith. Okay, back in chapter 12, when famine struck and when there was fear of the Egyptians, what did Abram do? He did not seek the Lord.

Right? Abram was relying on himself. He was attempting to grab the bull by the horns and wrestle the promises of God into existence. How did that go for him? Not well. And yet God was faithful anyway.

[10:13] But right here, the wrestling is happening in prayer before the throne of God. God. And Abram addresses God. It says, in the ESV, it says, O Lord God.

Other translations might say, O sovereign Lord. This is Adonai Jehovah. Adonai means Lord of all, sovereign. Jehovah or Yahweh is God's covenant name. So even Abram's address of the Lord is showing his faith in God.

And so he takes his complaints, his doubts, in a Godward direction. And God answers Abram in light of that, not with rebuke, but with reassurance.

Look at verse 4. 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.

We can scarcely imagine what that scene would have looked like with all of our light, all of our pollution. If you've been in Maine, if you've been in Utah or somewhere in the wilderness and seen a starry night, then we can begin to see what this is like.

[11:18] Count the stars, number them if you're able to. And then he said, so shall your offspring be. God confirms and illustrates the promise. Now this phrase, your very own son shall be your heir is more literally, and some of your translations have it more literally, out of your own bowels shall be your heir.

Your heir, the one to whom the promises are going to be passed down. It will not be your servant, Abram. It will be, it will be your biological son from your own body.

And God illustrates this promise by giving Abram now a second analogy to fuel and sanctify his imagination, right? He needs help imagining this because right now he has no son.

Before God gave him the promise that your offspring will be like the dust of the earth and now God says it'll be like the stars in the heavens. God loves metaphors. I'm thankful. There's a lot of metaphors in scripture. Now let's pause before we go to verse 6.

Abram provides for us an example, brothers and sisters, of what I'm calling Godward lament rather than inward brooding. Practice, the exhortation here, is for us to practice Godward lament not inward brooding.

[12:33] Now do you know what brooding is, kids? Do you know what brooding is? Brooding is stewing in your own thoughts. It's fixating on something in your mind. It's dwelling on something over and over and over again.

Perseverating is another big word. Now for example, this is totally hypothetical. This would never happen. Mom said we can't have ice cream today, but I just love ice cream.

If all I had to eat forever was ice cream, I would be in heaven. Why would she not let me have ice cream? Does she not love me? Does she not want me to be happy?

Does she want me to suffer? I can't even believe it. You know what? Billy's mom lets him have ice cream every single day. Maybe that's why I'm faster than Billy. I don't care. I want ice cream.

Okay, that's brooding. That's an example of brooding. Typically, very unhelpful. And adults, don't pretend like you don't do this. Maybe in the same exact way towards your spouse.

[13:31] Oh, she's not letting me have ice cream. We do this all the time, adults. We do this all the time. We ruminate in our own thoughts. We perseverate over things. And what does it lead to?

Spiraling negativity, right? It takes us further and further and further and further into despair. And what Abram and what one-third of the Psalms provide for us is a better way.

It's lament. Lament doesn't allow my brooding mind to just run away on me. It goes Godward with honest thoughts, honest feelings, and this impulse takes trust.

One commentator, Bruce Waltke, observes, it takes spiritual energy of faith to complain, that is, to lament before the Lord, in contrast to despairing silence.

It takes spiritual energy of faith. So I want to ask you saints, are there areas of your life where you're choosing to brood in silence, to mull over things in the abyss of your mind rather than lamenting before the Lord?

[14:41] Do you have doubts that you fixate on but you don't process with God? Are there things in your life that seem to contradict what God has promised? Right? God, you say this.

You say that you command your steadfast love over me. I don't feel that love right now. There's an apparent contradiction. There's a discrepancy but rather than take that to the Lord in his throne room, you mull over it.

Is there any area of your life like that right now? Brothers and sisters, God invites you. The Psalms of Lament are there because God is inviting each one of his children to bring those honest doubts and complaints before his throne to practice Godward lament rather than inward brooding and God will answer you.

God will answer you. It might not be in the way that you want. It probably won't be in a vision as with Abram but he will indeed speak to you.

When Abram cried out to the Lord, God replied and here's how Abram responds in verse 6. And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.

[15:49] And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness. So this is a crucial verse in the Bible and so important that this gets its own point here. Righteousness granted by faith.

This is the gospel again being preached beforehand through Abraham. I want to pick this apart a little bit. First, what does it mean that Abram believed the Lord?

Does it mean that he believed in God's existence? Well, clearly that's part of it but it means a lot more than that because James tells us that even the demons believe and shudder.

So it's not just mere believing in the existence of God though that's a good first step. In context here, Abram doesn't merely believe in God's existence. He believes that God is who he says he is and that God will do what he says he will do.

Abram is resting in God and his promises. He's taking God at his word. He's leaning on the Lord in dependence. He's staking his whole life on God and his word.

[16:53] That's faith. That's what it means when he says, when it says he believed the Lord.

Michael Lawrence in his book on conversion defines faith as wholehearted trust that God will keep his promises in the gospel.

Wholehearted trust that God will keep his promises in the gospel. Now second, what does it mean that God counted this faith to him, to Abram as righteousness?

He counted it to him as righteousness. To count is a legal term. It means to reckon or to credit. So God sees Abram's faith and as a result God reckons Abram as righteous based on that faith.

Abraham was justified. That means he was declared righteous in the court of God. That's what this means. Now of course this begs another question. What is righteousness?

Now back in chapter 6 verse 9 Moses said that Noah was a righteous man blameless in his generation and to be righteous. We defined righteousness then.

[18:04] We said that righteousness means to live rightly according to a standard, God's standard, to live rightly according to God's standards, to obey his moral law in everyday life.

See righteousness is not only in here, it's also out in my life. That's what righteousness is. So I want to ask another question. Were Noah and Abram righteous before God on their own?

I heard a soft no. Correct. Were Noah and Abram righteous before God on their own? No. They were sinners.

An example of failing. Do you remember what God said to Noah after the flood? After the flood. After he wiped out wicked humanity.

He said, for after the flood, the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. But Noah was declared righteous in his generation.

[19:06] And now we come to Abram and we've seen the idolatry of his past. We've seen his struggle with self-reliance, his struggle with unbelief. But here the text says he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness despite Abram's sin.

God looked at him and declared him righteous because of his faith. So I have another question. I have a lot of questions for you guys today. What does God do about Abram's sin?

His sin deserves punishment, doesn't it? He's broken the law. He isn't actually righteous on his own. Does God just unjustly ignore Abram's sin?

Does he ignore the fact that Abram has failed to uphold his law? In other words, how could God reckon Abram righteous by faith and still be just and still be holy?

This remains a tension all throughout the Old Testament. And it's a tension that is only resolved when we get to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[20:12] Paul says in Romans 4, which we read earlier, that 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.

God could reckon He's going to be Abram righteous by faith because 2,000 years later, Abram's offspring, who also predates Abram eternally, would be delivered up on the cross to pay for his sins. That's the only way God could reckon Abram righteous by faith is because Jesus would later pay for his sins on the cross and Paul's arguing as he does in Galatians 3, that wasn't a unique thing in salvation history.

Abram's justification by faith was not unique. It set the pattern and the precedent for how anybody would come to be declared righteous before a holy God. The only way is for us to cast ourselves in faith upon God whose Son was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Those who trust with wholehearted trust that God will keep his promises in the gospel. Now you might be sitting here thinking, well, I don't know if I really care to have a right standing before God.

[21:31] Like, I'm pretty comfortable where I am, I do pretty good things, and friend, I want to remind you of something. Noah's generation was likewise pretty comfortable where they were.

They were going about their everyday activities, they thought they were decent people, and they were ignorant that a flood was going to destroy them. And that's what God says is going to happen someday when Christ returns. You feeling comfortable is not the measure.

Whatever our culture tells us, you thinking that you're okay does not mean you're actually okay.

Now just consider this, do you write the rules that govern this nation?

No. And how much less do any of us write the divine rules that govern the universe? Nobody in our government does that.

Nobody in history, the Lord God alone. God made you, and he tells us this in his word, he made you to be in right relationship with him for your joy, for your flourishing.

[22:27] That's what we've seen in the book of Genesis, and sin breaks that relationship, that separation that starts now because of our sin. will one day be finalized when Jesus Christ returns, and heaven will be the happy home of those who've believed in God and have been credited with Christ's righteousness by faith.

Hell will be the horrific home of those who have not, and so I urge you, if you have not done this, to repent of your sin today and to put your faith in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation.

salvation. Now, some of you have a different problem. You know that you're not okay. You know that you don't have a right standing with God on your own.

You feel that separation deep in your heart and soul, but instead of resting in trust, you're striving, striving, striving to earn God's place in the family.

Like, you're acting as if God commissions the saints the same way that the Navy commissions a nuclear officer. Right? Do, do, do. Work, work, work. Impress your command. Show them how competent and how committed you are, and then you'll earn your place.

[23:38] You want to earn that degree. But that's not the gospel of grace through faith. That is a gospel of works. The gospel of grace, it totally frees you from having to earn God's favor because Christ already has on your behalf.

I lay down my garments, any empty boast, good works now all corrupted by the sinful host. That's us. We are the sinful host. But then, as we sing in this song All Sufficient Merit, I'm dressed in my Lord Jesus, a crimson robe made white, no more fear of judgment.

His righteousness is mine. So friends, rest from your striving to make yourself righteous and receive as a gift the righteousness of Christ by faith.

There's the gospel in Genesis chapter 15. Now this is a crucial midpoint of the chapter, but then it transitions to the next promise, the land promise.

So we had the promise of seed, the offspring, and now we come to the second promise, and look in your Bibles at verse 7. And he said to him, this is God speaking to Abraham, I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.

[24 : 58] God confirms the promise based on his faithfulness. Last time he confirmed a word based on his nature, his character, now he's confirming based on his faithfulness.

Now broadly speaking, Genesis 12-14 focuses on the promise of land. And then we transition in Genesis 16-22 is going to focus especially on the promise of seed.

This chapter is sort of the culmination of the land promise before we transition to the seed. And in this climactic moment, God is calling Abraham to faith in that promise of land based on his proven faithfulness.

Now you might recognize that phrase, I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans. What does God say to Israel after the Exodus? I am the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt. He says it over and over again right before he gives the law.

And now God's saying, I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans. Consider, God is saying, who I am and what I've done. I called you by grace out of your former life of sin into a relationship with me and I have proven myself faithful.

[26 : 07] Therefore, you can trust in my promise to give you this land to possess. And Abram responds in another, I believe, help my unbelief kind of moment.

Verse 8, but he said, O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it? Abram, he questions God's promise again. So as with the prior promise of offspring and maybe now emboldened by God's gracious response in that prior complaint, Abram goes again to his sovereign Lord where he's asking, how, I want to understand how this promise could actually come to pass.

Right? He's saying, okay God, I hear you, I believe you, but you realize I'm still a tent dweller dwelling under some other dude's oak trees. Right? Like, how in the world is this promise that the land will be my offsprings forever?

How in the world is that going to come to pass? So once again, he's taking that lament Godward and God once again graciously responds, now this time in a way very foreign to a 21st century American.

God confirms the promise by inaugurating the covenant. By inaugurating the covenant. The rest of the chapter is this ancient covenant inauguration ceremony.

[27 : 28] Now Israel would have been familiar with this ritual. It was practiced throughout the ancient Near East in which two parties would enter into a binding agreement. That's what a covenant means. And we've talked about covenants.

We saw the covenant with Noah. So two parties entering into this binding agreement. There's promises. There's generally stipulations. Now on the one hand, God has already entered into covenant with Abram.

He gave him a slew of amazing promises in chapter 12 and then confirmed them in 13 and 14. But the word covenant has noticeably been absent until this very moment.

Prompted by Abram's question, how am I to know that I shall possess the land? And God's reply is to essentially double down on his promise by making, literally verse 18, it's cutting, cutting a covenant with Abram.

Just as he had made a covenant with Noah. And so first, in verses 9 through 11, there is preparation. God tells Abram to bring him a female calf, a heifer, a female goat, a ram, a turtle dove, and a young pigeon.

[28 : 34] And apparently Abram knows to cut them in half and arrange them in a line, each half facing the other, probably because God told him to do that or else he would have been likely to burn them up as a sacrifice.

These are sacrificial animals, but he's not sacrificing them, right? He's cutting them, he's arranging them. And then we see these birds of prey come down in the carcasses and Abram drives them away and people debate what it means.

Maybe they symbolize the Egyptians who are going to threaten the fulfillment of God's promise. But either way, God has used Abram for the preparation and now Abram's action is done, right?

As the sun was going down, look at verse 12, a deep sleep fell on Abram and behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. The next few verses are this pre-ceremony prophecy.

Now, when God wants people to know, hey, I've got this all by myself, he puts him to sleep. Now, think about that every night as you go to sleep.

[29:41] Okay? You are about to become utterly useless to the world and God remains awake. God remains watching over the cosmos, every corner of creation.

Psalms 121, verse 4, behold, he who keeps you will neither slumber nor sleep. That was just a free sort of application point. When God wanted to solve Adam's problem of having no suitable helper, what did he do?

He put Adam to sleep so that he could create Eve out of his side. And so here, God puts Abram to sleep. He's like, hey, I've got this. You just go to bed. Now, this dreadful and great darkness that falls upon Abram perhaps symbolizes the terrifying presence of the Lord.

Hence, God's fear not at the start of the chapter. Perhaps it also symbolizes the dreadful thing that God then predicts. What does God predict? He predicts that Abram's offspring are going to become slaves in Egypt, afflicted for 400 years.

But then their oppressor will be judged and they will emerge, verse 14, with great possessions. And then God says, look at verse 15, as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace.

[30:50] 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. Now, there's a ton going on that we do not have time to unpack today.

So if you have questions on anything, as always, you can come talk to me. But I just want to note two things from those verses. First, God is foretelling to Abram that suffering and affliction precede the inheritance.

Suffering precedes the inheritance. Does that not sound like a pattern established for events to come? Second, God is predicting events that take place hundreds of years in the future and everything that God predicts to Abram comes to pass exactly as he says.

And so I just want to point out this aspect of Judeo-Christian prophecy in which very specific details are foretold then precisely fulfilled, that sets the scriptures apart, the word of God apart as something totally different than any other religious writings in the world.

These words are what they claim to be, the words of Almighty God. And God alone is the one who declares the end from the beginning, who accomplishes all his purposes, Isaiah 46, 9, and 10.

[32:06] God is the one who breathed out this word to mankind to write down for our instruction. And so you can take this word to the bank. This is the words not of men only, but of the Lord God, the living God.

He speaks and he knows everything that will happen from eternity past to eternity future. Okay, that's sort of an aside. The ceremony has been prepared.

The pre-ceremony prophecy is given and then we come to the ritual itself, the inauguration ceremony in the last verses. So look at verse 17. When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot, picture this in your minds, okay, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram. What does fire and smoke remind you of? These are symbols of God's presence, right?

Ones that Israel would be very well acquainted with, considering God led them with a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, considering that, and I think we're supposed to see a connection between these two events.

[33:21] At Mount Sinai before the giving of the law there was fire and there was smoke on the mountain before God entered into covenant with the people. And then later his glory filled the tabernacle.

Fire, smoke, this is the presence of God and so the presence of God passes through the middle of the torn animal halves and in this way God makes a covenant with Abram.

Now typically, again, this is very foreign to us. We don't do things like this today. Typically, in a covenant ritual like this, both parties would pass through the halves and they would essentially be saying, may I become like these torn carcasses if I fail to uphold my end of the covenant.

Now we see this. Jeremiah 34, 18. God says to Judah and the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut into and pass between its parts.

Now what is the striking thing about this scene in Genesis 15? Abram is asleep. He is not passing through the parts.

[34 : 28] Only God walks through the animal halves. God is taking all the obligation upon himself. God is making this unilateral, that means one-sided commitment to uphold the covenant promises.

And then God confirms and expounds on the land promise. He says, to your offspring I give this land. From the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, to the land of the Canaanites, the Canaanites, the Cadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

Ten nations. Those are ten nations. It's a representation. It's a sign of completeness of the land of Canaan. And this land, Moses is saying, well, God's saying to Abram, it's to extend from the outer branch of the Nile in the southwest all the way up to the Euphrates River in the northeast.

Now, this is the most all-encompassing picture we get of the promised land in the Old Testament. And so God, by passing through the animal pieces, all by himself, he is making this unilateral pledge with no help from Abram.

Your offspring will indeed possess the land. This will be indeed their eternal inheritance. And I think we can rightly infer here that promise of blessing that we saw in chapter 12 to Abram and the nations through him, this is also included in this covenant.

[35 : 54] And so there's this three-fold promise, land, seed, blessing. It is now a covenant pledge that God is declaring, I will bring these things to pass. I am guaranteeing the fulfillment of what I've promised.

And all this is in reply to Abram saying, O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it? God's answer is, let me tell you how you can know. Because the fulfillment of my promise depends solely on me.

How can you know? Because the fulfillment of my promise depends solely on me. that's how you can know. Now as we drive to a close here, I want to introduce attention in this passage that Israel would already understand, but we would not yet if we haven't gotten there.

And that is, if you look at chapter 17 and verse 1, which we're going to get to in a few weeks, God again appears to Abram and listen to what God says. I am God Almighty.

Walk before me and be blameless that I may make my covenant between me and you and may multiply you greatly. Did you catch that? And Abram's like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

[37 : 07] Hold on a second, God. You put me to sleep and you passed through the animal halves and now you're saying if you do X, then I'll do Y.

But I was asleep and you said you were going to do all those things regardless. Right, so, is this an unconditional covenant or is this a conditional covenant? And God smiles and is like, I think you're beginning to understand.

Friends, this remains a tension all throughout the Old Testament. Yet again, how could God on the one hand declare his unilateral intent to fulfill the promises and at the same time require that certain conditions be met?

How can both of those things happen? And again, the resolution to that tension comes finally in Christ at that climactic moment when darkness engulfs the land and the earth shakes and rocks are split as the Son of God in human flesh is torn upon the cross.

There he becomes the covenant curse that was rightfully ours. Abram deserved that punishment. You and I deserve that punishment.

[38 : 23] But for our sake, God made him, Jesus Christ, to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5.21 Christ fulfilled all the conditions of the covenant himself on our behalf and then on our behalf Christ was slain to pay for the curses that we had incurred.

And in that way, God unilaterally fulfills all of his promises to his people now and forever. You see how amazing this is? That's how the covenant could mysteriously be unconditional and conditional at the same time.

It's a paradox. It's a mystery. The gospel is the revelation of that mystery. And friends, this brings us all the way back to that central all-important verse. What is our part then?

What's our part? And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness. Believe in God for the success of the promise rests on him alone.

[39 : 31] Believe in God for the success of the promise rests on him alone. The success rests on our unfailingly trustworthy promise-making, promise-keeping God. And so I want to ask, brothers and sisters, why do you, and I'm part of the you, okay, why do we, I'm talking to Christians here, why do we think or act as if our salvation began as a work of God but then now somehow depends on us to bring it to completion?

Right? Why having received life by faith in Jesus, do you now look to your performance, your measuring up, your doing enough good deeds, your being a good enough dad or mom or friend or church member or whatever as your source of eternal security?

Paul would reprimand the church in Galatia. Oh foolish Galatians, Paul said, who has bewitched you? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 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. So saints, daily, moment by moment, we need to be looking to God alone for our hope, for our comfort, for our rest, for our identity, for our security, for our salvation.

The success of the promise rests on him alone and he proved that at the cross. He proved that at the cross. And just as a brief aside, the gospel is not opposed to working, only earning.

[41 : 11] Not opposed to working, only earning. Look, a saving faith will be demonstrated through good works. That's what James argues when he quotes this verse in Genesis 15. But those works, this is really important, those works are not a merit of salvation.

They are a mark of salvation. Let me say that again. Our good works as Christians are not a merit of salvation. Only Christ's merit gives us salvation. They're a mark. They're a mark.

They are the fruit that is born from a life that has been saved. Our salvation from first to last, it's the divine work of grace, of grace, of our promise-keeping God.

And saints, this confidence is bolstered as we rehearse the gospel of Jesus Christ and that enables us to endure suffering. Okay? Suffering. Remember here, God was showing Abram suffering is going to precede the inheritance and that becomes a pattern.

That's not just a thing that Israel experienced. We need to expect suffering to precede our own inheritance. Right? Israel endured affliction in Egypt before entering the promised land.

[42 : 16] That's repeated in Christ. He endured suffering before he was raised to life and glorified at the Father's right hand and now we repeat that same pattern in this life and the New Testament is very clear about this.

Paul says in Romans 8, 17, we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

But friends, that exchange is infinitely worth it. All of the trials of this life will be swallowed up in the victory that's to come. Paul says the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

It's whatever you're facing right now, whatever trial you're undergoing right now, it will not compare in the slightest. It won't even tip the scales one bit when you're before Christ in glory with all the saints and all the things of this world, death, mourning, crying, swallowed up.

Swallowed up. Expect suffering to precede inheritance. And friends, in our suffering and waiting, see number one. In our suffering, in our waiting, believe in God because the success rests on him alone.

[43 : 28] Paul says in Romans 4 that Abraham believed in God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. And so no unbelief made him waver concerning the promise.

He grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Saints, how much more should we?

We have the gospel. We have Christ crucified and risen again and the promises of his return and the new heavens and the new earth. We have all of that. So how much more should we hold unswervingly to the hope that we have to our faith in God?

Friends, we have all the more reason than Abraham even to trust in our promise-making, promise-keeping God who has sacrificed himself to give us the gift of righteousness.

That is, the gift of himself. He is the righteousness. He is our gift, our portion, our inheritance forever. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.