

Genesis 15

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- [0:00] in West Africa called Togo. Togo is located in the middle between Ghana and Benin. A group of missionaries went to the northern part of Togo to meet an unreached people group. Now, how should I describe unreached people group? Well, unreached people group is people who don't have much contact with outsiders. Sometimes this is done by their choice because they want to remain without outside influence. Or this is because of just the geographic location of where they live. Sometimes it's just impossible to get there. So the missionaries were very excited. They made the contact with this group of people and they were hoping to bring the good news of Jesus to this group of people.
- [1:06] So the missionaries got to this place where these people didn't really have much contact with the outsiders. And they were very thankful that the elders and the chief of the clan gave the missionaries permission to share the gospel with their tribe. So the missionaries started to begin sharing the story of Jesus Christ and the gospel promise with this group of people. And as they were sharing the gospel, a family told the missionaries, we know Jesus. We heard about Jesus. And we've been following the path of Jesus. And the missionaries were just shocked. They were amazed and they were so puzzled. Where and how did this family heard the news of gospel? They talk among themselves and they just couldn't figure out.
- [2:17] They thought they were the first people to share the gospel with this group. And yet there was a family already heard about Jesus and they were following the path of Jesus. We will come back to this story a little later on. Tonight, we're continuing our series in Genesis. We're going to read from Genesis chapter 15. And it is about God's covenant promise to Abram. We will look at three aspects of this covenant. First, what is this covenant about? What is in this covenant? Second, what is the significance of this covenant? And third, why is this covenant important to us? A covenant made to Abram thousands of years ago.
- [3:26] And why does this matter to us in 21st century? Let us pray. Lord, our God, we are grateful that you loved us first. And you pursued us with your love. We didn't love you first. You loved us first. And Lord, we are grateful that you sent your son Jesus to die in our place for our sins according to your promise.

And Lord Jesus, we are grateful that our Father God is a promise keeper and his words never return to him empty.

So as we read and study Genesis 15 tonight, Lord, we pray that you will prepare our hearts to hear your words.

And Lord, we pray that your words will start transforming our lives for your glory and for your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray.

[4 : 45] Amen. So please turn with me to Genesis chapter 15. And it's on page 10 in your pew Bible. Genesis chapter 15, page 10 in your pew Bible.

So what is this covenant about? What is in this covenant? So God makes covenant with Abraham, which contains threefold blessings.

The first is numerical blessing. The second is a geographical blessing. And the third is spiritual blessing.

Let's look at verses 1 through 6 together. After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision.

Fear not, Abraham. I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great. But Abraham said, O Lord God, what will you give me?

[5 : 53] For I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus. And Abraham 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.

Last Sunday evening, Pastor Greg preached on the previous chapter where Abraham went into a battle to rescue his nephew Lot, and Abraham returned victorious.

And now, perhaps, he feared retaliation from the enemies. So God tells him, Do not fear.

[7 : 12] I am your shield. I am your protector. And then he goes on to say, Your reward shall be very great. And then Abraham lets out his frustration.

What good is all this wealth and reward? I don't have a child. I have to pick somebody who was born in my house, probably a servant, as my heir.

So Abraham lets out his frustration to God. Now, according to the ancient custom, when a wealthy man doesn't have a child, he will pick one of his servants as his heir to inherit his wealth possessions.

But God told Abraham, No, no, no. Not this guy, Eliezer of Damascus, but your own son will be your heir.

And then he goes on to tell Abraham, Your descendants will be as many as stars in the sky. Now, we have learned in chapter 13, God told Abraham, Your descendants will be as many as the dust of the earth.

[8 : 40] Too many to count. So this is the numerical blessing, that your descendants will be as numerous as stars, as numerous as the dust of the earth.

And the important verse here is, And Abram believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

So Abraham is now known as a man of faith because he believed God. He believed God's promise.

Let's continue with verses 7 through 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, Oh 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 turtle dove, and a young pigeon.

[9:51] 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 the birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

Cutting animals in half was an ancient custom, symbolizing that one who breaks the promise will be like these animals cut in half.

So as we read chapter 11, Abram chased away the birds of prey, probably vultures.

Now the author of Genesis, pointing out this, was he just merely pointing out a natural phenomenon. Of course, you cut animals in half, and it will attract probably vultures.

Is this why the author of Genesis just pointing out a natural phenomenon? A Bible commentator said, these birds of prey symbolize Israel's enemies, the unclean, the idol-worshipping nations that surround Israel.

[11:11] I also believe that spiritually, this symbolizes the schemes of the devil, trying to distract, deceive, and sabotage good things.

We experience this in our spiritual walk. This morning, Pastor Matt mentioned Satan tempted Eve with the deception.

Satan told Eve, eh, you could eat the fruit. You're not going to die. You'll become like God. Do not follow God's rule. You don't have to listen to God's wisdom.

Listen to your own wisdom. You'll be like God. And don't we experience this? Satan trying to deceive us, distract us, and also try to sabotage what is really good for us.

So Abram chased these birds of prey away, and we need to chase the schemes of the devil away in Jesus' minded name. Now this is a geographical blessing.

[12:25] In chapter 12, God told Abram that I will make of you a great nation. In chapter 13, God told Abram to look all different directions.

He said, look northward, southward, east, and west. For all the land you see, I'll give to you and your offering, your offspring forever.

So a nation of Israel is born with this blessing. So the second blessing is a geographical blessing. And let's continue to read verses 12 to 16.

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 400 years.

But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace.

[13:47] 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.

So in verse 8, Abram asked God, how am I to know that my descendants or I shall possess this land?

So God reveals to Abram what's going to happen to his descendants. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram and behold, a dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.

So, when God was explaining to Abram that your descendants will suffer in slavery for 400 years, I'm sure that was very dreadful and terrible thing for Abram to hear and feel.

And yet, God tells Abram, but that's not where we'll end. Your descendants will come out in fourth generation with great possessions.

[15:04] And he also tells Abram, but you will die in peace. Let's continue with verses 17 to 21.

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking firepot 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 Canaanites, the Canaanites, the Kadmoneans, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

So God walks through these carcasses in a smoking firepot and a flaming torch as if he's putting his own signature to this geographic blessing saying, I will make you a great nation.

your descendants may suffer for 400 years under the bondage in Egypt, but when they come out, they will inherit this land and here is my signature.

[16:36] So he walks through these carcasses and consumed them with the fire. Now, the third blessing in this covenant is a spiritual blessing.

and it is found in chapter 12. In chapter 12, God told Abraham, in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

In other translations, it says all nations will be blessed through you. All ethnic groups will be blessed through you. Now, God did not explain this blessing in detail to Abraham.

but what God promised Abraham is basically this. I will send my own son, Jesus, as one of your descendants to save the world.

And it is shown in the genealogy of Christ. You can look that up in Matthew chapter 1 or in Luke chapter 3 and you can trace from the birth of Jesus to Abraham.

[17:49] So, to recap the threefold blessings, one, it was a numerical blessing, your descendants will be as many as stars in the sky, and two, I will make you a great nation, a nation of Israel is born, and the third, all nations will be blessed through you.

Now, what is the significance of this covenant? Well, continuing from the third, the spiritual blessing, God proclaimed the gospel to Abraham.

He's telling Abraham, I'm not only going to bless you with numerous offspring and make you a great nation, but I will also redeem this whole world by sending my son Jesus as one of your descendants.

In Galatians chapter 3, 18-19, it says, 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. if you believe like Abraham believed God, then you become blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

[19:21] Tim Keller puts it this way in his book, Galatians for you. this is why apostle Paul says in Galatians, those who believe are children of Abraham.

What matters is not physical descent from Abraham, like being Jewish, but spiritual descent, having the same faith as he did.

So what does it mean to have faith like Abraham? First, saving faith is believing the gospel promise. Second, saving faith is faith in God's provision, not our performance.

Another significance of this covenant is that it serves as a foundation for missions, both local and global. When we do mission work, it is tempting to feel as if we accomplish something for God.

First of all, it is God's mission. He mobilizes us to accomplish His purpose. All ethnic groups, all families of the earth, all nations will be blessed through you.

[20:44] And this is God's mission. Now, let's go back to the story of this family in Togo. So, the missionaries, they were amazed and they were puzzled by this family who already heard about Jesus.

So, the story unfolds when the father of this family became sick, they sought out a good, reputable hospital.

So, they went on a several hundred mile journey to this Christian hospital. And as their father was receiving treatment, the whole family had an opportunity to receive the gospel.

That's the way they heard about Jesus. and ever since then, they've been following the path of Jesus. Now, when we hear a story like this, our tendency is to praise, wow, you know, that's a great organization.

Like, who built that Christian hospital? Or you may say, wow, those Christian doctors and nurses and staff, they are doing wonderful things. But what we oftentimes forget is, who is really behind all this?

[22:08] This is God's mission. God already proclaimed to Abraham that I'm going to bless all nations, all ethnic groups through you.

And God's promise is just getting fulfilled. I was in Bolivian Amazon two months ago, serving on a medical boat for two weeks.

When we dock our boat in this village, there was a curious young man who came to our boat. He was just so curious. He wanted to know why we're here and what we're doing and where we're from.

I mean, he didn't have any medical needs. He was just so curious and he wanted to talk to us. Maybe he thought I was Jackie Chan. I don't know. But he was just so curious.

So, one of our translators got to know him and started to share the gospel with him. And the young man told us, I mean, as a custom, as a tradition, he grew up as a Catholic, but he never really understood or heard the gospel.

[23:22] And he never owned his own Bible. And he was really desiring to receive a Spanish Bible from us. So, the translator spent time with him.

He opened the scripture. He shared the gospel with him. And then, at the end, he gave him his own Bible. Now, does Samaritan's purse deserve any of the credit?

The volunteers deserve any of the credit? No. This is God mobilizing the volunteers, the translators, through Samaritan's purse, to fulfill his promise.

All nations, all ethnic groups, all families of the earth will be blessed through you. Now, in the beginning of the service, Pastor Greg read Isaiah chapter 55 verses 10 to 11.

Let's just turn to that real quick. It's on page 615. Page 615 in your pew Bible, Isaiah chapter 55 verses 10 and 11.

[24:37] For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth, it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

God's word never returned to him empty. God never makes empty promises. Isn't that amazing? Before we move on to why is this covenant so important for us, I'll tell you a story.

On March 12th, on an evening service just like this, Pastor Nick told us right before his sermon that my sermon is going to be about 40 to 45 minutes long.

Now the sermon in evening service, it usually, you know, it starts around 5 to 7, sometimes at 7 o'clock. Now that evening, I served the communion.

So I came up here after the sermon, as I'm standing next to Pastor Nick, I looked up and I saw that clock. And it was 7 or 5.

[26:07] And I, for a split second, I started to get really, like this excitement was like welding up inside of me. I said, wow, God, this is miracle. It's like Joshua, you know, you stop the sun from setting so Joshua can win the battle.

You stop the time. It's a 7 o'clock. Then suddenly I realized somebody forgot to turn the clock forward. Thus daylight time saving had begun.

So every time I look at the clock, now I look at it a little bit differently. So, okay, let's continue. why is this covenant, why is this covenant so important for us?

Well, it is God, it is God who pursued Abram with his love. Abram did not pursue God.

God initiated this whole thing. What about us? What about you? How did you come to know Christ? who told you the gospel?

[27:13] A friend? Your parents? Online sermon? A Christian book? No matter how you've come to know the Christ, it was not a coincidence.

God pursued you with his love even before you were formed in your mother's womb. Just like my experience in Bolivia or the story about this Togo family, God pursued them with his love because that is his covenant promise.

All nations, all ethnic groups, all families of earth will be blessed through you. Whether you're in Bolivia, whether you're in United States, Europe, Asia, it doesn't matter.

God proclaimed that you will be blessed because of my son Jesus and what he did on the cross. And that is the spiritual blessing and that is why this covenant is so important for us.

Now, if you have never been to a church in your life and if you're sitting here today, this is not an accident. God's been pursuing you with his love your whole life.

[28:40] Jesus told us a parable of a shepherd searching and searching for that one lost sheep. God's been pursuing you like this shepherd with his redeeming love.

In 1 John chapter 4, it reads, God first loved us. God loved us even to the death of his son, Jesus. And what's really amazing is that Jesus did not just stop there.

Jesus did not say to God, Father, I obeyed you. Die for these people. Now I'm done with these sinners. I did my part. Thank you. Jesus didn't say that.

Jesus also promised us with threefold blessings. Jesus knew the time has come for him to leave, for him to die.

So he tells his disciples, one, I will never leave you like orphans. and two, I will send a helper, Holy Spirit, to help you, to guide you, to comfort you.

[30:04] The Holy Spirit will intercede for you. Jesus is saying that I am not going to be with you physically anymore, but the Holy Spirit will live inside of you.

And third, I will go and prepare a place for you, then I will come back to bring you back home with me to God's kingdom.

Please reflect with me. You may close your eyes if you wish. God's are you hurting tonight because someone made a promise to you but did not keep it?

Are you struggling with pain and anger or living the consequences of that broken promise? Please bring them to the Lord and ask Him for healing.

ask Him to enable you to forgive. Just like we read tonight in Isaiah chapter 55, God never breaks His promises.

[31:20] Just like Abraham believed God, won't you believe Jesus who came to die for your sins just like God promised? And let the Holy Spirit live inside of you comforting, healing, helping, and praying for you till Jesus comes back to bring you home to God's kingdom.

Let us pray. Lord our God, we praise you and honor you and thank you for this precious covenant promise that you made with Abraham thousands and thousands of years ago.

And Lord, your word never returns to you empty. And Lord, because of your promise that now our sins are forgiven, we have eternal life with Jesus, and we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us to help us and guide us and comfort us and heal our wounds.

And because the Holy Spirit continually intercede for us, Lord, that we are just amazed by your love and what you have done for us, Lord.

so Lord, help us to continue to remember this promise each day and live in joy giving you thanks and honor and all the glory.

[33:19] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Would you stand with me as we sing our closing song together?

Amen. I hear the Savior say Thy strength indeed is small Child of weakness watch and pray find in me thine all in all Jesus paid it all all to him I owe sin had left a crimson stain he washed it white as snow Lord now indeed

I find thy power and mine alone can change the leper spots and melt this heart of stone Jesus paid Jesus paid it all all to him I owe sin hath left a crimson stain he washed it white as snow for nothing good have I whereby thy grace to find I wash my garments white in the blood of

Calvary's lamb Jesus paid it all all to him I owe sin had left a crimson stain he washed it white as snow and when before the throne I stand in incomplete Jesus died my soul to save my lips shall still repeat Jesus paid it all all to him I owe sin had left a crimson stain he washed it white as snow sin had left a crimson stain he washed it white as snow a

I think there's some cold drinks and snacks at the back.

[37:31] Feel free to stay around for those. And take note of, on the back of the bulletin, there is a list of...