

Theme: God's Covenant is given in order to confirm His promises so that we might embrace them by faith.

## I. Intro - Iconic Moments

- A. February 23, 1945 - Iwo Jim Flag Raising
- B. Joe Rosenthal captures 5 Marines; 1 Corpsman
- C. Today's text is iconic like that!
- D. What is happening: What does it teach me today?

## II. God's Promises & Abram's Struggles

- A. God had given Abram great promises (Genesis 12:1-3)
  - 1. Posterity - a nation of descendants (12:1,7)
  - 2. Provision - God's blessing & Land (12:2, 7)
  - 3. Prominence - a great name (12:2)
  - 4. Protection - God would protect Abram (12:3)
  - 5. Summarized in two promises: seed and land (12:7)  
The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.  
Genesis 12:7
  - 6. God gives them anew in our text  
After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Genesis 15:1
- B. Abram's struggle - and ours
  - 1. God promised offspring - but no child yet  
But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." Gn 15:2-3

- a. God had promised seed - but no children yet!
  - b. Abram wanted to believe - but how could he?
- 2. God promised land - but Abram had none yet  
He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."<sup>8</sup> But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" Genesis 15:7-8
    - a. God had promised land - but no land yet!
    - b. Abram wanted to believe - but how could he?
  - 3. Circumstances are eclipsing Abram's faith - how can he know?
  - 4. When circumstances eclipse our memory of God's promises to us, our faith begins to waiver

## III. God Confirms His Promises By Covenant

- A. God gives a sign for the promise for offspring  
Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir."<sup>5</sup> He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Genesis 15:4-5
  - 1. God promises to keep His word to Abram
  - 2. Count the stars - a staggering renewal!
  - 3. Abram responds - with faith!  
Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6

4. God gives gracious signs to strengthen our faith to hold on to His promises! We need to embrace these and respond to God in faith!

#### B. God confirms the promises by covenant

He also said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." <sup>8</sup> But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" <sup>9</sup> So the Lord said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." Genesis 15:7-9

1. What a strange response! How will this help?
2. God is setting up a covenant ceremony - an oath will be made

- a. Abram knows what to do without being told

Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Genesis 15:10

- b. God refers to this as a covenant

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram ... Genesis 15:18

#### C. Understanding this covenant ceremony

1. Animals are slain and cut in half to form a path between the parts of the animals
2. Parties making a covenant walk between the pieces
3. Parties take a self-maledictory oath - "May this happen to me if I do not keep this covenant"
  - a. We know this from other documents of ancient covenant ceremonies
  - b. Jeremiah 34 speaks of a similar ceremony

1. Rulers took an oath to free slaves but broke it  
The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for the slaves... <sup>11</sup>But afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves they had freed and enslaved them again. Jeremiah 34:8, 11

2. The covenant breakers will bear the penalty - death!  
The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. <sup>19</sup>The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, <sup>20</sup> I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. Jeremiah 34:18-20

4. Cost of broken covenant is death - just like the animals!

## IV. Covenant Oath Sustains the Promise & Faith

#### A. Hard times will seem to threaten the promises

As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.

<sup>13</sup>Then the Lord said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. Genesis 15:12-13

1. Thick and dreadful darkness surrounds Abram
2. Promise threatened by hard times - slavery
3. Promise threatened by delay - 400 years!
4. Will Abram & seed be able to keep the covenant?
5. Perhaps Abram should reconsider!

## B. God alone takes the covenant oath

As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him...

<sup>17</sup> When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. <sup>18</sup> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram... Genesis 15:12, 17–18

1. Abram is asleep when the covenant is made
2. Smoking firepot and blazing torch - a theophany (same words as when God comes down at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19-20)
3. God alone bears responsibility to keep the covenant
4. If Abram and their descendants fail to walk faithfully - and they most certainly will - God will take the covenant curse upon Himself
5. No matter what comes, Abram will never be forsaken - for God's own Son will bear the covenant curse, being forsaken, crushed and killed for us!
6. No matter the circumstances, we are never forsaken for Christ has taken the covenant oath and borne the curse in our place - this is the Gospel!

## V. Applying the Word

### A. Responding in faith to God and His covenant promises

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:6

What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>4</sup> Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. <sup>5</sup> However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. Ro 4:3–5

1. Abram believed God and was credited as righteous
2. The NT tells us this is justification by faith alone
3. This is another example of Gospel rather than law
4. We do not live by our own works, but by God's faithfulness
5. If you have never embraced Christ by faith - do so today!

### B. Trusting in God's covenant promises for all of life

1. Circumstances can cloud God's promises
2. But we have every reason to trust in God's covenant
3. Christ has already come and fulfilled the covenant
4. Christ has already borne the covenant curse
5. If God did not spare His Son, how can we doubt He will fulfill His promises to us?

### C. The Table of the Covenant

#### Understanding Covenants

Deuteronomy 29:9-15

January 5, 2020

Communion

Hebrews 13:20-21

Teaching keywords: Covenant; blessing; faith; justification; biblical characters

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13:20–21

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, “O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” <sup>3</sup> And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

<sup>4</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” <sup>5</sup> He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

<sup>6</sup> Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

<sup>7</sup> He also said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

<sup>8</sup> But Abram said, “O Sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

<sup>9</sup> So the Lord said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

<sup>10</sup> Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. <sup>11</sup> Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him.

<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that

your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup> In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”

<sup>17</sup> When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. <sup>18</sup> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — <sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, <sup>21</sup> Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.” Genesis 15:1–21