

<Read text: Genesis 15:1-6>

By any amount of human reckoning, Abram had a problem. He had been blessed by God, and quite richly. He was a wealthy man. But more than that, God had promised that Abram would be a great nation, and that out of that nation would come someone who would be a blessing for all nations. And yet there was a pretty big disconnect between the promise and reality. Abram had no children. And the window for having children was closed. He was nearly a hundred years old and his wife was ninety. Now, yes this was still in a time when people were a little longer lived than we are today, but not by that much anymore. Even if we were to adjust the scale slightly to what we're used to, this would be like say, a 70 year-old man and a 65 year-old woman. Biologically speaking, this wasn't going to happen.

There was no one to carry on his great wealth, there was no one to create this great nation from. By the custom of the day, the best that could happen would be that his closest servant would have to be adopted as a son and get everything. And yeah, maybe that guy would have a big family, but it wouldn't be from Abram. It didn't look like the promises and the reality were going to line up. Abram, with a degree of humility points this out to God. We shouldn't take this as Abram questioning God or doubting God necessarily, but there may have been a degree of nervous anticipation in this. Abram needs assurance that what he has been promised will somehow pass.

And so God simply tells him, no, you will not leave your inheritance to your servant, but your own flesh and blood. You will have a child, Abram, and from that one child will come a nation so large it will outnumber the stars in the sky. And Abram's response to God's assurance? He believed him. Now, I want you to think about that for a minute. Because, consider what that took. Because on the one hand, consider the situation. We're talking about the apparent impossible here. Imagine having a problem like that, where the solution seemed insurmountable and all you got for assurance from someone was "yeah, don't worry, I'll fix it." Not a when, not a how, just, "I'll take care of it." How many people in your life do you trust enough to let get away with that kind of an answer about anything, let alone something as big as this? Abram's wife wasn't pregnant when he got home. The situation wasn't miraculously fixed right then and there. All he had was God's promise that it would happen. And yet, Abram hears God and believes him. Literally in the text the verb here is "Amen." Abram said, "Amen," to God's promise. To use Luther's explanation of that word we might say, "This is most certainly true."

The fact that God made the statement, the assurance, was enough for Abram, he didn't need any more than that. God is not a man that he should lie (Nu 23:19). When God speaks, when he declares what will be, that is a promise and it is as good as accomplished fact, whether it has come to pass yet or not, no matter how far-fetched it may sound. He's GOD. He can do it and he will do it. Abram accepted this without further question, God's word was good enough for him.

And that was good enough for God. God saw Abram's trust in him and he credited that trust to Abram as righteousness. Now a word on "righteousness" because it's one of those big words we tend to say too often without really thinking about or even knowing what it means. "Righteousness" itself means that a person is "right". And biblically speaking, that means right in the eyes of the only judge that matters: God. This means that a person who is righteous stands before God with a clean slate. No blemishes, no defects, no crimes to his record. He is right. Now, that does not describe Abram. He was as human as the rest of us, if you want to go right to the big example he lied about his relationship to his wife to the Pharaoh of Egypt and nearly derailed the whole plan of salvation by doing so.

But the accumulated record wasn't what God was interested in. The Lord looked at Abram, saw Abram's trust in him, and counted that as righteousness. Abram wasn't, but the Lord declared him to be anyway. Because of the faith, because of his trust, he was right with God. It didn't matter what sins might have come before or after, the righteousness that came by faith covered them all. And that faith trusted God when he spoke his promises, that faith listened and followed when God gave directions. Abram wasn't good enough, but his faith was good enough for God.

Now, Abram might be a fairly exaggerated example of how this works, but the point of all this is that the dynamic between God and human beings hasn't changed a bit. Abram wasn't some exception that God gave special treatment to, his relationship with his Lord worked the same as all of ours does. And it's not that different when you think about it.

You and I have problems. Problems that range from simply obnoxious to the seemingly insurmountable. Bills and debt, constant health struggles, strained and broken relationships, people we have to work with, jobs we don't like, a leaking roof, whatever. You know what you struggle with, you know how well it can feel like a long strong thrust of trouble or a thousand pinpricks of annoyance that seem like they'll drive you insane. And at time, it seems like a big disconnect between what we go through, what we ask God for and what he said when he said he would always be with

us, help us and protect us. We don't want to question God (we do anyway, sometimes) but it really does seem like what he promised and what happens to us doesn't line up. So like Abram, even in humility, we'd like to ask God sometimes, what's the deal?

The difference is that unlike Abram at the time, our problem is usually that we're either asking the wrong question or looking at the promises from the wrong perspective. Because as annoying and painful and even terrible as all those earthly problems can be, they can't hold a candle to our one really big problem. You know what I'm talking about, the problem of our eternity. The problem of the divide we've caused between ourselves and God. Only the righteous can approach heaven, only the righteous are allowed in. God will not take the sinful and that is what we are. When our God has spoken we have doubted. When he has promised us security, we have been afraid. Where he has promised to always provide for us, we have hoarded. Where he has promised all things for our good, we have gotten angry at him for what he allows. We are not worthy of the eternity with him and that is the real problem of our lives.

It is to this greatest problem that God speaks his greatest promise. He simply says, "I will rescue you. You owe a debt because of your crimes and your failures. But I paid that debt. I had no reason to other than because I chose to care about you. And yet I did it anyway. The debt had to be paid in blood and I paid it with my own. I died for you so you could be free, so you could be with me forever." This is the promise of God to us. And that is good enough for us. Have we seen it with our own eyes? Were you there as Christ shed his blood? Did you see your sin travel to him on the cross? No. But that doesn't matter. We have the sure promise of God that these things are true. And that is good enough for us to trust that it is true.

And that good enough for God. It is the sure trust in him that God credits as righteousness. Our trust in him is the means by which we receive his saving grace. Faith is not what saves us, but it is the method by which the salvation comes to us. And that trust itself is a gift from God. Born as we are hostile to God, there is no way we would come to accept some far-fetched story about a God who loved his own creation enough that he would go to die for them even though they hated him. About a God who demands nothing from the people who've failed him and instead does all the work for them. That is absurd to the human ear and it is only because God has created trust in each of us that we can believe it. It is a gift from him. It is a gift he created and it is a gift he continues to nurture in each one of us through the power of his word.

It is the word, the promises themselves that create and sustain our trust. They cause it and they are what our trust is placed in. We know we are saved because of the word, because of the promises. Our trust is in them, not anything else. Faith has nothing to do with our feelings, our emotions. You don't have to "feel" saved to be saved. You don't have to walk out of here on some emotional high for it to have meant something. And that's a good thing. Feelings are fickle, they can't be relied on. The word and promises of God do not change. In the same way we don't put our faith in people or a building. How many times have we seen it happen where someone gets offended or let down by another member or pastor and they think that's a cause to leave their church or join a different church that doesn't teach the truth of God's word? They throw away the only part that matters over something that's essentially irrelevant.

Keep your trust in the promises of God and you will not be disappointed. He has promised, above all else, to rescue you from this world. And although he makes other promises, this one is paramount. He has promised to be with you and he has promised to protect you. But that doesn't mean you'll be spared every kind of pain and have success in all you do. A wiser man than myself put it this way, "The prayers, of course, that ask for a life of ease and a soul free of every temptation, a successful outcome to our greed, or an escape from the consequences of our willful sins he [God] answers like this: 'That is never what I promised you; if I gave it, you would worship ease; and without temptations you would become a self-righteous Pharisee. If I gave you success in your favorite sins, you would wallow in them and perish eternally. So, see, I have something better for you: enough good things so that you do not despair and enough troubles and temptations so that you do not forget me and my Word. Indeed, the greater the blessings that you consider good, the greater too shall be the troubles and the temptations, so in all things you may remember my grace that matches your weakness, my forgiveness that covers your sin, my help that humbles the proud and raises up the fallen.'"

God promises us what is best for us. And though we may not always see how he will accomplish it, we know what the end result will be, a life eternal with our God in heaven. And it is good enough for us that God promises this. We trust it, and that trust is good enough for God. By that we are credited with righteousness. And we are right with our God. Amen.