

SESSION #6

Let's return to Genesis 15 verse 6 again because this is a pivotal verse in the story of Abraham & the history of faith!

And he (Abram) believed the Lord, and He (God) credited it to him as righteousness.

- this verse contains the **first appearance** in Scripture of 3 more wonderful words: “believed”, “credited”, and “righteousness”
- it is one of most significant verses in entire OT, a significance confirmed by the fact that it is quoted 3 times in the NT [Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6, James 2:23]
- verse 6 answers one of oldest & most important questions of mankind, voiced long ago by Job in Job 25:4:
 “How then can a man be righteous before God?”
 ...well, Abram shows the way... “he believed the Lord”
- he “**believed**” = he was full of trust & confidence in God
 - this Hebrew word literally means, “Amen, it will be so; it is so.”
 - up to now Abram has had a rather *impersonal* relationship to the promises;
 now he comes to a **personal relationship** with the *God* of the promises
 “The flyer must wait in absolute trust.” – but this trust is in a trustworthy Person, the absolute Absolute!
- Abram has been **realistic** about his **situation**
 - from a human standpoint Abram & Sarai were “as good as dead” as far as parenthood was concerned
- but he is now **realistic** about **God** – or, ‘faith-full’ about His power to deliver on the promise
 - Abram could have said, “I can’t!” – and been absolutely right
 - but instead he said, “**God can!**” – and that was the focus faith required
 - FAITH is trusting the God who has promised to “overcome the present for a new life” ...as Brueggemann put it (worth *repeating*...)
 - or as Jesus put it in John 16:33:
 “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
 - we the flyers, hanging in the gap, exercise trust in the One who has “overcome” ...and we “take heart”

What was the result of Abram’s faith?

- it was “**righteousness**” = a right relationship & right standing with God; the character or quality of being right or just
- not even Abram had the moral qualities or spiritual stature to be considered “righteous” on his own before God
 - this quality could only be realized as a “gift” – something ‘credited’ to him by a gracious God
 - so God took the **faith** of a spiritually bankrupt, barren Abram and in **exchange** absolutely topped up his account with God’s own **righteousness**

Rom. 4:2-3 in The Message translation says, “If Abraham, by what he *did* for God, got God to approve him, he could certainly have taken **credit** for it. But the story we’re given is a God-story, not an Abraham-story. What we read in Scripture is,

“Abraham entered into what **God** was doing for him, and *that* was the turning point. He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own.”

- coming into personal relationship with God involves **trusting** not *trying* – we are saved “by faith”

- and walking with God in this relationship is a continuation of the same principle: trusting, not trying

Paul wrote in Gal. 2:20b “The life I live in the body, I live **by faith** in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (NIV)

And again in the next chapter, Gal. 3:5-6 he said, “Answer this question: Does the God who lavishly provides you with his own presence, his Holy Spirit, working things in your lives you could never do for yourselves, does he do these things because of your strenuous moral striving *or* because you **trust him** to do them in you? Don’t these things happen among you just as they happened with Abraham? He believed God, and that act of belief was turned into a life that was right with God.” (The Message)

- and the RESULT of *our* faith is also **RIGHTEOUSNESS** – a gift given us by a gracious God

- forgiveness is like taking a bath to get rid of dirt;

- righteousness is like putting on suitable clothes that I may be properly dressed

- that “clothing” is Christ – God gives us perfect righteousness by putting us in Christ

“For He [God] has made Him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

- like the father of the prodigal son who put “the best robe” on his son, God puts “the best robe” on his forgiven children...

“Christ” our Righteousness

- we can then be suitable to the Father, fit to be in His presence, and *conscious* of our suitability...not because of our own goodness, but because God now sees us “in Christ”, robed in His righteousness

- so God does for us what He did for Abraham, as a result of FAITH...a trusting in God to do what He promised

“The flyer must never try to catch the catcher.”

We’ve been looking at Saving Faith. Now let’s examine...

B. Justifying Grace

Gen 15:7-8

Then [God] said to [Abraham], “I *am* the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.”

⁸ And he said, “Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?”

- at this point, God answered Abram’s request for **assurance** (“how can I know?” vs. 8) with an unusual & awesome ceremony: making a **covenant**

- or as it literally is in Hebrew, “*cutting*” a covenant

Gen 15:9-21

⁹ So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹ And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him...

...¹⁷ And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. ¹⁸ On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying:

"To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates..."

- what God does here would be something familiar to people in Abram's day
 - those making a covenant agreement would split sacrificial animals like this, and then both parties would walk thru the narrow gap between the pieces; signifying that if they break the terms of this covenant they will suffer the same fate as these animals
- but **God alone** passes between the pieces, using symbols of smoke & fire to show his presence
 - i.e. the covenant made here is **unilateral** – it is *not* a mutual agreement on equal terms; the Divine covenant is initiated by God, promised by God, ratified by God, fulfilled by God...alone
- Abram's question in vs. 8 had been, "**How shall I know**" the promises will come true?
 - what was *God's answer*?
 - ...by God's own personal **guarantee** given in this unilateral **covenant**
 - the fulfillment of the promises rests *entirely on GOD* – not on Abram's goodness or greatness, not on his wealth or his works
 - by confirming the covenant by himself, and walking between the sacrificial pieces alone, God is effectively saying He is willing to be 'torn apart' like those sacrificial animals rather than see His relationship with humanity broken
 - ...and that is precisely what happens 2000 yrs later: on the **cross** Christ's body was "broken", a sword was plunged into his side, nails pierced his hands & feet – **GOD** Himself took the place of covenant-breaking children of Abram and paid the price we should have paid!
 - those who through faith recognize that Jesus did this for them are 'made right' with God – **justified** ... it is "just-as-if I had never sinned"
 - Rom. 4:25 – 5:1 "He [Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Therefore, since we have been **justified** through **faith**, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (NIV)

Rom. 10:8-11 “It’s the word of **faith** that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us. This is the core of our preaching.

Say the welcoming word to God—“Jesus is my Master”—embracing, body and soul, God’s work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That’s it. You’re not “doing” anything; you’re simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That’s salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: “*God has set everything right between him and me!*” Scripture reassures us, “No one who trusts God like this—heart and soul—will ever regret it.” (The Message)

- what the Bible calls “sin” is essentially **man** substituting himself for **God**
 - and what the Bible calls “salvation” is essentially **God** substituting himself for **man**
 - “God took the sinless Christ and poured into him **our sins**. Then, in exchange, he poured **God's goodness** into us!” (2 Cor. 5:21 LB)
- the focus of God’s covenant with Abram looked ahead to Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham, the Promised Seed, who would take man’s place & pay the penalty for this broken covenant
 - this covenant then is an evidence of “**grace**” – a provision by God alone without man’s work or merit

Rom. 4:4-5 in The Message translation says: “If you’re a **hard worker** and do a good job, you deserve your pay; we don’t call your wages a gift. But if you see that the job is **too big** for you, that it’s something only *God* can do, and you trust him to do it—you could never do it for yourself no matter how hard and long you worked—well, that trusting-him-to-do-it is what gets you set right with God, *by God*. Sheer **gift**...

(*down to verses 13 – 16*) “That famous **promise** God gave Abraham—that he and his children would possess the earth—was not given because of something Abraham did or would do. It was based on **God’s** decision to put everything together for him, which Abraham then entered when he believed. If those who get what God gives them only get it by doing everything they are told to do and filling out all the right forms properly signed, that eliminates personal trust completely and turns the promise into an ironclad *contract*! That’s not a holy promise; that’s a business deal. A contract drawn up by a hard-nosed lawyer and with plenty of fine print only makes sure that you will never be able to collect. But if there is no contract in the first place, simply a *promise*—and God’s promise at that—you can’t break it. This is why the fulfillment of God’s promise depends entirely on trusting God and his way, and then simply embracing him and what he does. God’s promise arrives as **pure gift**.”

...pure gift, sheer **grace**

Lewis Smedes wrote: “Why do we call **grace** amazing? Grace is amazing because it works against the grain of common sense.

Hard-nosed common sense will tell you that *you are too wrong* to meet the standards of a holy God; pardoning **grace** tells you that it’s all right in spite of so much in you that is wrong.

“Realistic common sense tells you that *you are too weak*, too harassed, too human to change for the better; **grace** gives you power to send you on the way to being a better person. Plain common sense may tell you that you are caught in a rut of fate or futility; **grace** promises that you can trust God to have a *better tomorrow for you* than the day you have made for yourself.”

Let's wrap up this session with a quick summary about...

C. Covenant Assurance

- in answer to Abram's "how can I know?" question, God provided His covenant – a unilateral promise extending grace
 - His **covenant** is still the **answer** to *our* persistent questions "how can...?"
 - How can the sins of someone like me, who blows it over & over, be forgiven? How can I be sure that God will be there for me, as imperfect as I am? How can I know the promises are true when my reality seems so grim?*
 - we 'know' by looking back at the cross & empty tomb of Christ, with faith
 - just as **Abram** looked forward to the fulfillment of God's promise in the covenant, by faith
 - **faith** bridges the reality gap for us, just as for Abraham
 - ...a personal trusting in God that He is able & willing to do what we are utterly unable (& usually unwilling!) to do
- If our standing with God & our hope for the future depended on our **own works/efforts**, then we could never be sure we've done enough
- but since **GOD** himself made the covenant, and fulfilled it himself in Christ, we can be absolutely sure –
 - we can **KNOW**...
 - ...that our relationship with God is solid – we are members of His forever family
 - ...that He will "bring to completion" the work He has begun in us, even if that work involves considerable pain
 - ...that He will carry us through in the meantime
 - ...and that the future He promised will come, even if the waiting seems to go on forever
- *we – the flyers – like Abram, wait in absolute trust knowing that the Catcher will catch us*