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Sermon

June 13th, Third Sunday after Pentecost

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev 1:5-6 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is the 15th chapter of Genesis:

After these events the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. He said, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” 2 Abram said, “LORD God what can you give me, since I remain childless, and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 Abram also said, “Look, you have given me no offspring, so a servant born in my house will be my heir.” 4 Just then, the word of the LORD came to him. God said, “This man will not be your heir, but instead one who will come out of your own body will be your heir.” 5 The LORD then brought him outside and said, “Now look toward the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” He said to Abram, “This is what your descendants will be like.” 6 Abram believed in the LORD, and the LORD credited it to him as righteousness. 7 He said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession.” 8 He said, “LORD God, how will I know that I will possess it?” 9 The LORD said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” 10 Abram gathered all of these, divided them in half, and laid the two halves across from each other, but he did not divide the birds in two. 11 Birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. 12 When the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. Then terrifying, deep darkness fell on him. 13 The LORD said to Abram, “Know this! Your descendants will live as aliens in a land that is not theirs, and they will serve its people, who will afflict them for four hundred years. 14 But I will surely judge the nation that they will serve. Afterward your descendants will come out with great wealth, 15 but you will go to your fathers in peace. You will be buried at a good old age. 16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come here again, because the guilt of the Amorites is not yet full.” 17 Then when the sun had gone down and it was dark, suddenly a smoking oven and a flaming torch passed between the pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram. He said, “To your descendants I have given this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates. 19 I will give you the territory of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaites, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

“Do you promise?” You have probably both asked and been asked this seemingly simple question. Perhaps you have been asked this when you told your spouse that you intended to do something like mow the lawn or fix the screen door. Maybe you were required to promise that you would indeed do it because perhaps you had failed to come through in

the past. Or, maybe a child has asked you this. Maybe you said, “We will go to the zoo tomorrow” and they were excited to the point where they really wanted to be sure that would indeed happen. “Do you promise?”

We like to be promised things because we know from experience that people do not always do what they say. People say all kinds of things, and many

promises are broken. How many politicians promise to do things before they are elected and then afterward fail to come through on them. We want promises because people so often fail to do what they say. Then we get those promises, and those also get frequently broken.

What if you had been promised something impossible? Would you believe it? What if someone came up to you and said, "I promise you that I will give you 4.8 million dollars"? That would be pretty hard to believe. The reason I theorized 4.8 million is that is what a recent suspicious email promised me recently. It read *"Hello, I have a donation worth \$4,800,000.00 US Dollars for you, I won the America lottery worth \$40 million USD and I donated a part of it to charities in memory of my deceased wife, who died of cancer. you can contact me for further information."* I get emails like this all the time and my email service often doesn't even bring them to my attention. They get filed away as spam because it's clearly too good to be true.

But when it is the LORD making the promise, we shouldn't be surprised or skeptical. Why? Because when He makes us a promise, it's as good as done already. He promises us all kinds of things. But these aren't promises made halfheartedly. They aren't some good intentioned promises that are soon forgotten. They are binding. They are certain. And they may seem impossible at times. But with the LORD nothing is impossible. Something that seems to be impossible with the LORD is certain. He promises much and unlike anyone else, the LORD always comes through! We pray: LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

The man known as Abram had many promises made to him by the LORD. He was assured that he would become a great nation and his descendants would possess a great deal of land. God told him to move everything he had and go west and then south. He had done all of this and was blessed physically. He had great wealth, many servants, and much

livestock. Abram knew that all he had been given was done so out of God's good mercy.

But even though he knew that the LORD would deliver on His promises which He had made, those promises were taking time. Abram was not a young man. He was somewhere in his 80's when this happened. God comes to Abram here, first with a comforting promise: **"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."** Clearly, something was on his mind. He was probably wondering what it was all for. He did not have any children. God had promised to make Him a great nation. But here he was, aged with no kids. **"LORD God what can you give me, since I remain childless, and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"**

If Abram were to die, there would have been no one to pass down his great wealth to. This Eliezer was a member of his household but wasn't family. What about the promise that the LORD made to him? God told him in Genesis 12: **I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:2-3 NKJ)** How would any of this happen? Had the LORD forgotten His promise to Abram? The fact that Abram would ever have a child, let alone become a great nation, seemed impossible.

Sometimes we feel this way as well. We know what the LORD tells us in His Word, what He has promised us. But it seems like it doesn't happen. It's hard to be a Christian. To walk by faith and not by sight is a challenging thing!

But God had not forgotten Abram and gave a detailed image to remind him: **5 The LORD then brought him outside and said, "Now look toward the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them." He said to Abram, "This is what your descendants will be like."**

Have you ever been out in the country and looked up at the stars? We can see stars all the time, but

because of light pollution, they can be hard to notice at times. But, when you get out in the middle of nowhere, and it's a clear night, the massive number of stars are a sight to behold. Their number intensifies against a clear back drop. According to one estimate, there are about 100 billion stars in our galaxy. There is so many that they truly cannot be numbered.

What a strong image for Abram! How would such a huge number of descendants possibly come from a man so numbered in years? Sarai and Abram would have a son, Isaac. When he was finally born, Abram now Abraham was 100 and Sarai now Sarah would be 90!

As impossible as that seemed at the time, Abram would indeed become a huge nation. And Abram believed it. **Abram believed in the LORD, and the LORD credited it to him as righteousness.**

Was he naive? No. The promise seemed impossible, but it was the LORD making the promise. Faith that believes the impossible is not naïve, it's just faith! Abram believed the promise by faith, and it was credited to him as righteousness. We too can believe what God has promised us!

That is what righteousness is. Luther said, "Righteousness is nothing else than believing God when He makes a promise". Promises are meant to be doubted. But not with God. Why? Because His track record is impeccable. When He promises something, it's not forgotten or negged on. It always happens. It might take a while to happen, as this promise did. But when God promises something, it is as good as done already!

God had renewed His promise to Abram that he would become a great nation. Now God would go on to promise a home for that nation. **7 He said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession."**

It was the LORD who told Abram to get up and come to this place. He did this with the intent that Abram would one day live there. At the time Abram

was a stranger in a strange land. Eventually, this would become his ancestral home.

But Abram wanted to know how. He wanted proof. God would give him a dramatic one. He had Abram sacrifice a heifer, a female goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon. The animals were sacrificed and cut in two. But not the birds. Birds of prey saw an opportunity for a free meal, but Abram chased them off. As night approached, no doubt he was exhausted. Then, as the sun went down, he fell into a deep sleep. Then, a sudden and terrifying darkness. Then the LORD spoke out of the darkness: **"Know this! Your descendants will live as aliens in a land that is not theirs, and they will serve its people, who will afflict them for four hundred years."**

Basically, the LORD told Abram the long term future of his family. Again, His son was still probably about 15 years away from even being born. The LORD told him that his family would live in a land that was not theirs. This, of course, ended up being Egypt. They would become enslaved, but God would deliver them. They would leave with great wealth. Then, in 4 generations after that, they would finally come to their promised home.

Again, it was a promise, but not an immediate one. God was promising something to a people who had not been born yet. But everything that He promised here would indeed come to pass.

To further illustrate the promise and the point, the LORD did something interesting. **17 Then when the sun had gone down and it was dark, suddenly a smoking oven and a flaming torch passed between the pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram.**

I am not sure how this looked like exactly. A smoking oven and flaming torch passed between the pieces of the sacrificed animals. What did this all mean? Well, it was a covenant.

A covenant is another word for promise. But it was more than just that. Have you heard the phrase, "cut a deal"? That comes from the covenant idea. When two men made of covenant, they would cut an animal

in half, like what Abram did here. Then the two men would both walk through the middle of that animal. It was a symbolic pledge that if either party failed to keep that pact, then the fate that animal suffered would also befall them.

But here, Abram is not doing anything. He is a passive part of this covenant. It is the LORD doing the walking through. This smoking oven and flaming torch is passing through the sacrifices. This is a very symbolic image. It would be through the pillar of smoke and fire that the nation being promised here would be delivered out of Egypt. God's covenant with His people is cut out of sacrifice. How many animals would be sacrificed to the LORD by Abram's nation? All those sacrifices pointed ahead to an even greater one. Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of everything promised to Abram and to you here today as well.

Here, God promised to Abram's nation a home. It would be this very same land that they would one day live. The amount of land was gigantic. But so would be the people. But this was not to happen yet. Why? **In the fourth generation your descendants will come here again, because the guilt of the Amorites is not yet full.**

The promised land was not empty. It had many different peoples living there already. The biggest tribe was perhaps the Amorites. But Moses lists all these different tribes here, some of whom we know absolutely nothing about. These people still had a time of grace. God's mercy for these people was the reason for this delay. But the promise had been made and it was as good as done.

What does any of this have to do with us today? It's a pretty strange text, possibly one that you might have no familiarity with. What do a smoking oven, a flaming torch, cut in half animals, and obscure ancient tribes have to do with you here in America in 2021? Well, everything... It all has to do with God's holy plan for mankind's salvation. We have talked a lot about how Abram had to wait for the promises of God to happen. But happened they did. Mankind had been

given the promise of a Messiah back to our very first parents, Adam and Eve. Since the beginning of the world, a Savior was awaited. And finally, it happened when a baby was born to a virgin in a manger.

Think of all the impossibilities that had to happen from Abraham till Christ? A son would be born to an extremely old couple. A son would also be born to an extremely young woman, a virgin. The nation of Abraham would survive through slavery, conquest, idolatry, and exile. Through many, many different miraculous means this nation would survive. It all happened so that a Son of Abraham would be born for the sake of the world. Jesus was the reason that through Abraham **"all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** And then, Abraham was asked to make an impossible sacrifice. This time it wouldn't be heifers, goats, rams, or birds. It would be that very same promised son. Abraham would be asked to sacrifice Isaac. But Isaac would be spared. God sacrificed His Son Jesus. He would not be. Why? Because His sacrifice made the impossible reality.

Your redemption was impossible. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Even one sin disqualifies us from righteousness. But even before we were born, we were sinful. We were born dead in our trespasses and sins. There was nothing we could ever do about. There was no sacrifice we could make. There was nothing we could do to hold up our end of the bargain. We were dead. Life for the dead is impossible. We would just go through the motions of being alive but dead spiritually. Eternal life? Impossible. Eternal death? A certainty!

And yet, the tables were turned with our Savior Jesus. He took our place and gave us salvation. He was willing to die in our stead so that we could live with Him forever. Why? Because the LORD is good! How He greets Abram is how He greets you! **"Do not be afraid... I am your shield, your very great reward."** He has promised you salvation. His promises are unlike any other because His promises always come true. Your sins have been washed away. Faith allows you to believe it, impossible as it might

seem. And because you do believe that Jesus has lived, died, and rose again for you, to you **the LORD credited it as righteousness.**

How often we fail and are failed by promises. What have we promised? We have promised to be faithful to the LORD. We have promised to turn from our sinful ways. We have promised to live our lives for Him alone. And...WE FAIL!!! We fail with those promises so much and so often, one can't help but feel hopeless. Truly, we are lost. Eternal life for sinners like us? Impossible!

But not with the LORD!!! **But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Mat 19:26 NKJ)**

With the LORD and with Jesus, what was once impossible is now a certainty and our eternal hope. Do we continue to fail with our promises to each other and to God? Every single day. But every time we do that, we turn back to God and see Him keeping up His covenant of salvation. We see Jesus, our eternal sacrifice, on the cross. There, the sinless Son of God took my sins upon Him. There, His holy blood cleanses me from all unrighteousness. There I have forgiveness and grace.

At the time, Abram had no heir and no home. But both were promised to him and happened just like God said it would. We too seem to be strangers in a strange land. Is there any kind of future for us here? What's it all for?

We are all sons of Abraham. We have been blessed through His Seed, JESUS. **Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. (Gal 3:16 NKJ)**

Therefore, rejoice! God has promised you salvation and a future with Him in heaven! Will it happen tomorrow? Who knows... We will probably have to wait a long time for it to be fully realized. But the LORD has promised it. It is as good as done. It should've been impossible, given the sinful nature that

so often dominates our lives. But the impossible salvation has been won for you by your God and Lord Jesus. With Him as your Savior, impossible in nothing. He has promised, it is a covenant sealed in His holy blood. We believe in that promise, and it is credited to us as righteousness. We live by faith, and we will live forever by our promised Savior Jesus! AMEN!!!