

## **Believing the Unbelievable**

9<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 08/10/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Genesis 15:1-6 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 6 **“And [Abram] believed in Yahweh, and He (Yahweh) judged to him, righteousness.”**

### **Introduction**

- ✧ As we begin, try to place yourselves in Abram’s sandals for a bit. A few years ago, Yahweh promised you at the age of 75, that you would become a “great nation”; that your ancestors would make your name great.
  - ➔ And now, some years later, you and your aging wife have still had no children. But now, He takes you outside and tells you to “look toward heaven” at the countless stars that He created and hung there and that’s how many people will be your ancestors.
  - ➔ All of the biological evidence, as well as your own life experience, says that’s virtually impossible, right?
- ✧ That a couple, now in their 80s, could have children is about as crazy as I’m sure it would have sounded to Abram if someone were to tell him as he looked at the night sky, that one day a man from earth would actually stand up there on the moon.
  - ➔ And yet, we now know in hindsight, that God made that impossibility a reality; providing all of the chemical, electric and other natural resources and reactions here on earth – along with the ingenuity and learning required to envision, design and create a propulsion system, rocket and everything else needed to actually send men to the moon 4000 years or so later.
  - ➔ Yes, God did that, using mankind as His instruments.
- ✧ But for Abram to believe that which we now know has actually happened would have been unbelievable – not only sending man to the moon, but also the idea that he and his wife Sarai could bear children at their old age.

### **I. God Initiates the Covenant**

- ✧ And yet that is exactly what God initiated and promised to Abram earlier in Genesis, chapter 12. It was there that Yahweh came to Abram for the first time and said “to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”
  - ➔ It’s important to note that this covenant relationship was initiated, enacted and sustained 100% by God. Abram was entirely passive in this affair.
  - ➔ God promised to give Abram five things: 1) a land; 2) He would make Abram a great nation; 3) He would bless Abram; and 4) He would make Abram’s name great. And where would these four undeserved gifts lead? What would be the ultimate point of this amazing promise? 5) “You will be a blessing.”
- ✧ Again, imagine you are in Abram’s place. God is promising that He will work His unbelievable and miraculous work through Abram and Sarai and their offspring for generations to come in order to bring the ultimate blessing of life eternal to all the families of the earth!
  - ➔ How would you respond? Well, God also gave Abram the gift of faith, just as Jesus says in John 6:29, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom [God] has sent.”

- ✘ So, in that faith, Abram, Sarai and his family left their home and came to the land of Canaan, where Yahweh said, “To your offspring I will give this land.”
  - ➔ But because of a famine they went to Egypt for a while. But Abram’s selfish and fear-motivated plan to lie about who Sarai was; thinking that he needed to protect her from Pharaoh rather than trusting in God failed miserably, so that they were kicked out of Egypt.
  - ➔ When they came back to Canaan, Abram’s nephew settled in Sodom – east and south of the Dead Sea and Abram went the other direction to Bethel.
- ✘ It’s there that Yahweh reiterated His covenant to Abram. He said in Genesis 13:14-18, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. ... So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to Yahweh.”
  - ➔ After a while, the kings around Sodom went to battle and Lot and his family were taken captive in the midst of it. Abram heard this and went with his men by night and rescued them. When they returned Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of Yahweh blessed Abram as he gave a tithe; a tenth of his plunder as an offering to God.
- ✘ So, what are we to learn from all of this that happened before we come to our text here today?
  - ➔ #1 – God is the beginning, the middle and the fulfillment of this whole relationship - with mankind (after all, He is our Creator); with Abram; and with all of us who are Abram’s heirs through God’s gift of faith in Jesus.
  - ➔ #2 – God is the one who came to Abram as an unbelieving sinner and He initiated His covenant of salvation.
  - ➔ #3 – God reassured Abram when he began to slip in his faith, thinking that perhaps he needed to take charge of protecting and even helping to bring God’s promise about.

## II. Sin seeks to Undo the Covenant

- ✘ But as we see in verse one of today’s text, God knew well what sin and Satan were working inside of Abram. Why else would He start out His vision to Abram by saying, “Fear not, Abram...”?
- ✘ Because doubt is perhaps Satan’s favorite trick to play on us all. To Eve in the Garden of Eden that was the devil’s first question, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Gen. 3:1) And Paul, in Ephesians 6:16 speaks of the “the flaming darts of the evil one” that the devil throws at us all day, every day of our Christian lives. Satan even tried that trick on Jesus out in the wilderness when he started out two of his temptations by saying, “If You are the Son of God...” (Mat. 4:3, 6).
  - ➔ Now in verses 2-3, we see that doubt and questioning taking ahold of Abram so that he had the nerve to say to Yahweh, “...what will You give me, for I continue childless...”. Even repeating it, just to make sure God is listening, “Behold, you have given me no offspring...”.
- ✘ You see, it’s not only Satan’s direct attacks that seek to undo God’s covenant relationship with Abram and us, but it is our very own sinful desire as well. James 1:14 says, “Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.”
  - ➔ Jeremiah 17:9 confirms this truth about our nature when it says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” And Jesus leaves no doubt when He says in Matthew 15:19, “For out of the (human) heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”

➔ But still we bristle all the time at the concept of someone else, even God, being over us. If we don't say it, we think it to ourselves, "This is my life, and I can do with it whatever I want." To think like that; to think that "I am the master of my own life and not even God can tell me what I should or shouldn't be thinking or doing" is the very definition of a sin-filled way of life.

➔ And anyone who fights against that truth is one who has swallowed the devil's lies, hook, line and sinker; one who is fully at peace with his/her sin-centered ways and rejection of God and His truth.

- ✘ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 pulls no punches and tells us what is really true about our lives, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

### III. God's Covenant is Fulfilled in Jesus

- ✘ This is what Abram was struggling to do, just like you and I do every day. Yahweh, of course, knew Abram's struggle. So, He came to him in verse one and said, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield" (v.1). Paul says something similar when he directs us today in Ephesians 6:16 how we are protected from the devil's flaming darts, "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one."

➔ Yahweh even says to Abram, in verse one, according to the original Hebrew, "I am your exceedingly great reward."

- ✘ Yes, God bases His gift of faith to Abram upon His own creation of all things. In verse five He brings Abram outside and tells him to "Look toward heaven, and number the stars if you are able to number them" which of course it is impossible for any human being to do, even today with the most powerful telescopes that we have.

➔ In essence God is saying, "If I created the stars in the sky and the dust of the earth, both of which you could never count; and if I, as Jesus says in Matthew 10:30-31, have even numbered the individual hairs of your head, then 'fear not' Abram, because I not only care about you, but I am most certainly able to remember and bring to fulfillment My promise to give you children as your heirs."

- ✘ And the end point of God's promise to Abram finds its fulfillment in his ancestor, 42 generations later (Mt. 1:17) in the birth of Jesus Christ. This is what Abram "believed" and trusted in, through God's gift of faith, even though it was impossible for him to comprehend on his own.

➔ Our Epistle Reading today begins in Hebrews 11:1 with the definition of this faith. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It was impossible for someone pushing 80 years old to think that he and his wife could ever conceive and have heirs as many as the stars in the sky at night or the dust of the earth.

➔ It is impossible for you and me as sinners to the core to think that we could ever be forgiven of all the wrong that we have done in our lives; let alone that we could be the ones to inherit the same grace, forgiveness, and eternal blessing that God promised to Abram. None of us, including Abram and Sarai deserve that kind of miraculous gift.

- ✘ And yet as Jesus said in Matthew 19:26, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." And it is through Jesus and His death and resurrection in our place that God first of all blessed Abram by fulfilling His promise, and also blessed you and me and the people of all nations and generations by paying the price required to cover the penalty of the sins of all mankind.

➔ This is what God promised Abram and this is what God did for us all. He has washed and cleansed all who have not rejected His gift of faith in the blood of Jesus. Just as He judged

Abram to be righteous by His belief in the promise that Jesus would come, so He has clothed you and me in the robe of Christ's righteousness today so that we now "look forward" as Hebrews 11:10 says of Abram, "to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God." That's our eternal home in heaven before the throne of God where we will see Abram, Sarai and all true believers in Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

- ✧ Abram finally came to trust and believe in Yahweh and His promises even when those promises seemed unbelievable to the ways of this world. Today you and I believe the unbelievable promises of God as well. Why?
  - ➔ Because God has promised us in Jeremiah 29:11-13, "I know the plans I have for you, declares Yahweh, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." And what difference does that make in the way we live and move and think? God's promise continues, "Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will hear you. You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart."
- ✧ What comfort, peace and joy we have from God to be like Abram in God's gracious gift of faith. What a blessing to believe the unbelievable and see it all come true in Jesus. Amen.