

13. The faith that is accounted for righteousness

5/22/2005

The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall.

Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, and with faith we are freed from the flimsy enclosures of life that only fear allows to entrap us.

Again, faith is not faith if we can see. If we can see the whole thing, it should be called as 'acknowledgement'. Faith only work when we don't see the situation or promise that were made to us, yet trust the One who made it.

Many of us say, "We have faith in God." But when we face difficult times, some of us crumble under the pressure of our unbelief.

There are a tremendous difference between 'everyday faith' and 'textbook faith'. We can have all the knowledge in faith that we have learned from the Bible, but if we don't actually trust God's promises, that is not faith. But the 'everyday faith' is what we need. Without seeing and knowing what God is going to do, with simple trust in His promises from the Bible, if we trust and start to do the things from that base, that is a true faith in God.

This morning we are going to see a glimpse of the conversation between God and Abram about his descendants while Abram himself is old without any child.

A. I AM YOUR SHIELD AND REWARD

Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

This now is the fourth time that God has appeared to Abram.

There was a good reason why God said, "Do not be afraid." Because Abram had just defeated a much larger army. A counter attack from them was to be expected. Abram needed a shield of protection. And he needed reward because he had just turned down great reward offered from the king of Sodom.

God knows how to become the answer to our need. When we need a shield or a reward, He becomes those things for us. Besides, God never tells us do not be afraid without giving us a reason to put away our fears.

The faith that conquers fear is faith in the Word, not faith in feelings. That is why we need to memorize the Bible verses and put them in our hearts.

B. THE HONEST DOUBT GOD ACCEPTS

Genesis 15:2-3 But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

Abram did not want a reward. He wanted an heir. He was now 85 years old, and for 10 years he had been waiting for his promised son to be born.

Eliezer might have been a good man, but not a son to Abram. When God is not doing the things He promised, it is often our tendency to come up with our own solution which is anything but the right thing to do.

Did Abram's question mean he doubted God? Yes. But there is a tremendous difference between a honest doubt and skeptical attitude. God always has met honest doubts where they are, but God does not even acknowledge the demands of skeptical people.

C. YOUR DESCENDANTS LIKE STARS

Genesis 15:4-5 And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." 5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

It has been said, "When the outlook is bleak, try the uplook." Abram had been looking around, trying to solve his problem. But the answer lay in looking up.

About 30,000 stars are listed in the General Catalog used by astronomers, but it is estimated that there are 100 billion more! God did not say that Abram would have that many descendants but that, like the stars, there would be too many to count. Whether Abram looked down at the dust or up at the stars, he would recall God's promise and have confidence. This promise was repeated to Abram in chapter 22 and reaffirmed to his son Isaac.

God did this because He knows how much we need to be reminded. That is one of the reasons why we see many repeats in the Bible.

God often states a promise with such certainty, we believe it will be fulfilled right away, but the fulfillment of this promise was still 15 years away.

By the way, one of those descendants would be the Bright and Morning Star Lord Jesus.

D. THE FAITH IN GOD THAT ACCOUNTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

When Abram put his trust in God, specifically in God's promise to him, God credited this belief to Abram's account as righteousness.

There are essentially two types of righteousness: righteousness we accomplish by our own efforts, and righteousness accounted to us by the work of God when we believe.

Since none of us can be good enough to accomplish perfect righteousness, we must have God's righteousness accounted to us by doing just what Abram did: he believed in the Lord.

This is one of the clearest expressions in the Bible of the truth of salvation by grace, through faith. This is the first time the words like 'believe' and 'righteousness' are

used in the Bible. It is the Gospel in the Old Testament, quoted four times in the New Testament – Romans 4:1-3, 4:9-10, 4:19-24 and Galatians 3:5-7.

This is the key verse of the chapter. Within this key verse, we find three keywords: Believe, Counted and Righteousness.

1) The Hebrew word translated “believed” means “to lean your whole weight upon.”

Abram leaned wholly on the promise of God and the God of the promise. We are not saved by making promises to God but by believing the promises of God.

The faith making Abram righteous wasn't so much 'believing in God', as it was believing God. Those only believing in God – in the sense of 'believing His existence' has not much of faith. I have met many people who claimed to believe in God, but they say that they are not born-again Christians. That is not true faith in God. That is nothing more than acknowledging that there is a god somewhere so-called upstairs. Do you know what the Book of James says about this?

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!

According to James, demons know and believe God's existence. But do they go to heaven? Absolutely not. So just believing that there is a god in heaven doesn't make anyone to go to heaven. When that God become the Savior and Lord of one's life, then he or she would go to heaven. No other way.

2) What was Abram's greatest need? Righteousness.

This is the greatest need of people in our world today, for *“all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* according to Rom. 3:23. *“There is none righteous, no, not one”* in Romans 3:10. It is not enough to be “religious”. God demands that we have perfect righteousness or He will not let us enter His heaven.

3) How did Abram receive this righteousness?

He believed the Lord, and righteousness was imputed to him. “Impute” means “to put to one's account.” On the cross, our sins were put on Jesus' account when He suffered the punishment that belonged to us. When you trust Him, His righteousness is put on your account, and you stand righteous and forgiven before a holy God.

E. SHOW ME THE CONTRACT

Genesis 15:7-11 Then He said to him, “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?” 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.

For centuries, Israel was a nation without a land. And it seemed that the covenant promises would not be fulfilled. Then came May 14, 1948, and the rebirth of national Israel. Just as God kept His promise to Abram and sent the Messiah, so He will keep His promise and restore the land to His people.

Abram's question was not a sign of unbelief but a request for a token of assurance. He was confident that God would give him the promised son, but the land was in the

hands of ten pagan nations. It was one thing for Abram to own the land, but how would his descendants possess it so they could enjoy it?

What is described in 15:9-17 was known in that day as “cutting a covenant.” This solemn ritual involved the death of animals and the binding of people to a promise. The persons making the covenant would sacrifice several animals and divide the bodies, placing the halves opposite each other on the ground. Then the parties would walk between the pieces of the sacrifices in declaration that, if they failed to keep their word, they deserved the same fate as the animals.

Genesis 15:12-16 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. 14 And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

At the end of the day, God has still not appeared to walk through the animal parts with Abram. Instead, God causes a deep sleep to fall upon Abram.

God is saying to Abram, “I cannot put you in this land now because I love Amorites also, and I want to give them a chance to turn to Me.” And God gave the Amorites more than four hundred years to see if they would turn to Him. The only one in that land who turned to Him was that Canaanite woman, Rahab the harlot who lived in Jericho. She turned to God and she believed Him. All God asks us to do is to believe Him. God gave the Amorites this great period of opportunity.

Genesis 15:17 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-- 19 the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

As Abram is either asleep or perhaps still groggy from the deep sleep he had been under, he sees God do an amazing thing: pass through the animal parts all by Himself, while Abram watches on the sidelines.

God represents Himself by two emblems: a smoking oven and a burning torch.

1) The smoking oven reminds us of the pillar of cloud representing the presence of God in Exodus 13:21-22, the smoke on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:18, and the cloud of God’s Shekinah glory in 1 Kings 8:10-12.

2) The burning torch reminds us of the pillar of fire representing the presence of God in Exodus 13:21-22, of the burning bush displaying the presence of God before Moses in Exodus 3:4, and of the fire from heaven which sometimes consumed sacrifices God was well pleased with in 1 Kings 18:38.

Abram never “signed” the covenant, because God “signed” it for both of them.

The certainty of the covenant God makes with Abram is based on who God is, not on who Abram is or what Abram does. This covenant cannot fail, because God cannot fail. We don't make the covenant with God, but we merely enter into the covenant by faith.

By entering into this contract, God was putting His Deity on the line as a confirmation of His oath to Abram.

This covenant God signed alone. Abram did not haggle with God over the terms. God established and Abram accepted. Abram cannot break a contract he has never signed.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) God's efforts are strongest when our efforts are weakest.
- 2) God doesn't ask us to understand His plan for our lives, but He asks us to trust Him no matter what. And He is worthy of our trust.
- 3) When we see God for who He is, it is easy to trust Him. Faith does not completely depend on knowledge, but the right knowledge of God gives great strength for faith.