

Easter 2

Genesis 15:1-6 – Not Seeing is Believing

April 10-12 by: Pastor Wessel

Genesis 15:1-6 – After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Introduction – I've got something for you to look at. It's a ring – as silver ring with a cross on it. I don't wear it very much. You look confused. You can't see the ring? All you see is an egg? Well, the egg is hollow and the ring is inside. Do you believe me? I could be tricking you. I could be lying. People are that way sometimes. But I'm not lying. I'm not tricking you. The ring is really in here.

Abram (also known as Abraham) was faced with a similar dilemma. He was seeing one thing, but God was telling him that something else was true. God told Abram, "You're going to have a son." "Really? It sure doesn't look like it. I'm an old man. My wife is too old to bear children." Abram struggled with the fact that he couldn't see what God promised to give. But even though he couldn't see, he believed. And by his Spirit given faith in God's promises, God considered him a righteous man – holy in God's eyes.

People often say "seeing is believing". That what Jesus' disciple Thomas wanted: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." (John 20:25) But God reminds us: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for." (Hebrews 11:1, 2)

People will say, "If I can't perceive something with my 5 senses – taste, smell, see, hear, touch – then it cannot be real. Abram would step in and remind us:

Not Seeing is Believing

I. Even when we can't see, God gives what we need

II. Even when we can't see, God gives more than we need

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What was it that Abram was seeing in his life, with his own 2 eyes? He was seeing that he and his wife Sarai had no son, so his trusted servant, Eliezer of Damascus, would have to take over his estate. But God saw something different: "*This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.*"

Abram, of course, could only look around at the present time, at the circumstances he was facing, and come to his conclusion. God could look at the present and the past and the future and correct Abram by informing him ahead of time exactly how God was going to bless him and his wife. God reminds us that what we see now is not necessarily what will be. What might be the only logical conclusion, based on all that our 5 senses can take in right now, is not necessarily how things are going to turn out in the future. Circumstances change.

We can be pessimistic, guided by realism or by resignation, and know that sin and its curse and our own sinfulness will bring unwelcome change to our lives and our world that will be horrible and difficult and hard to deal with – overwhelming. Or we can be optimistic, standing securely on God's promise to take care of his people, to preserve, protect, and strengthen our faith. Then we know the changing circumstances of our lives will be God's tool to bring long-lasting blessing.

God told Abram: "*Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.*" Abram was concerned about being childless and didn't see how God could make him the "Exalted Father" (that's what Abram means) of a great nation. But God, the Shield, would protect Abram from whatever would try to harm him as a stranger and alien, living among people who did not share his culture and beliefs. God, the Very Great Reward, would provide riches greater than Abram's own material wealth as he walked Abram's faith through trial after trial. Abram never did see the Son who is the Savior of the world before he died, but he did see his first son, Isaac, a child from him and his wife, who would add a branch to his family tree.

Matthew begins his gospel: "*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" The promise given to Abram was important to the people of God at the time of Jesus. They knew that the Savior had to be

Abram's descendent. God knew what needed to be done for Abram and reassured him he was taking care of the situation, even though Abram couldn't exactly see how.

What is it that you need right now from God? God knows. It might be different from what you would like. It might be different from what you think is best. But God knows what you need and he will provide that blessing for your faith. It may not be easy, but remember: God is also your shield and your very great reward.

When you are huddled up in fear like the disciples on Easter evening, with the doors locked tight, listen to what God says: "Do not be afraid." Just like Abram, even though our eyes may tell us we should be afraid, we have every reason not to be afraid. *"The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."* (Romans 4:23-25) The living Christ takes away our fear and reassures us that God is on our side, giving us what we need today. It is not our good deeds that take away our fear because we could never do enough. It is God, who through Christ declares us righteous in his eyes. That takes away our fear forever.

II. Even when we can't see, God gives more than we need

What else does Abram see in God's vision besides a son from his own body? He sees stars – lots of them! Probably thousands of them in the desert sky, with low humidity and no artificial light pollution. Why does God show him the stars? To make the point to Abram that God gives much more than we need. Abram needed to have one son to fulfill God's promise. But God shows him that he is going to have thousands of children. *"So shall your offspring be."* God promised a glorious future for Abram's family, many descendants, a great nation of people.

This promise of descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky was reaffirmed generation after generation, so that when Moses was preaching his farewell sermon before the offspring of Abram entered the promised land, he could say, *"Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky."* (Deuteronomy 10:22)

But why stop there? The New Testament reminds us that Abram's children are not just those who are physically descended from Abram. They are especially those who, like Abram, *"believed the Lord and he [credits it to them] as righteousness."* Maybe you've heard the song, *Father Abraham?* *"Father Abraham had many sons, Many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them and so are you, So let's all praise the Lord."* If the stars represent those who share Abram's faith in our forgiving Lord and our resurrected Savior, then I guess you would have to say that we are all shining stars. Abram saw that his faith in the Lord, which seemed so rare in his day, was actually a faith that would be shared by many people in the future.

Why should one old man believe such a promise? Well, consider the source of the promise. The promise came from a reliable source who never had and never would let Abram down. God does not lie. He does not change his mind. Once he makes a promise, he will keep it. Did you trust me when I told you there was a silver ring with a cross on it inside this hollow egg? Here it is! I am just a man. I can be wrong. I can make mistakes. But God is over all – all-mighty, all-knowing. His word is more reliable than mine.

Is it foolish to set our hopes on God's richest blessings beyond our wildest imagination? Many would say it is foolish to have the faith of Abraham. The letter to the Hebrews says, *"By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."* (Hebrews 11:9, 10) Put your faith in the future? Put your faith in something you can't see? What about now? What about today?

God does give us today, but he says we are truly wise when we work today while keeping in mind our future home that he has given us through Jesus Christ. Both the present and the future are real for us. Both involve not seeing, yet believing God's ongoing promise of what he is doing for us now and will be doing for us in the future. People may mock our belief in a future that we are certain of. They may say that we as individuals get to decide our own future. We do certainly make decisions that affect the future, but we also believe that God's purpose is done and our future is in his careful hands.

Conclusion – People may not believe the proof that the Bible presents for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. They might not accept the testimony of the Missionaries that Jesus sent out. They may not acknowledge the fact of the Holy Spirit working powerfully in people's lives through the Word of God. But we do and Abram did and Thomas did. Remember who you are and don't be ashamed of it. *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:26-29) Amen.