

“God’s Promises Lead Us To Say - AMEN”

Today, as we look at a snap shot of the life of Abraham, it will be helpful to remember what comes before and after this chapter of Scripture. In chapter 12 of Genesis, at the age of 75 – Abraham and his 65 year-old wife, Sarah, leave their homeland in order to go to an unknown land because God promised this aging couple with no kids that their family would become a great nation and that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through them. Yet later in the chapter we see Abraham lying to the pharaoh in Egypt in order to protect his life – telling him that Sarah was his sister and not his wife. In chapter 13, Abraham selflessly allows his nephew Lot to choose the better land for ranching and farming even though he knows it could hurt his livelihood. Then in chapter 14, Abraham defeats an army that had vastly outnumbered him and which was much better trained in order to rescue his nephew Lot who was in this mess because he took the better land. And because Abraham knew the victory was from God and not men, he had refused to keep any of the captured treasure or to accept gifts from those he saved. Yet in chapter 15, as you will hear in a minute, we see Abraham doubting God’s promise of a son from chapter 12. After God repeats His promise to Abraham in our lesson today and makes a covenant with Him, in the very next chapter we see Abraham taking God’s job into his own hands and conceiving a son with Hagar, his wife’s servant. Then in chapter 18 we see Abraham selflessly praying that Sodom and Gomorrah have more time before God brings his judgment upon those wicked cities, but then in chapter 20 we see Abraham lying again in order to protect his life – telling another king that Sarah is his sister. Then in chapter 22 we see Abraham ready to sacrifice his promised son, Isaac, the one he had waited 25 years to have – simply because God told him to. When we consider the life of Abraham we are left gasping – “What trust! What doubt! What renewal! What backsliding!” And to think, Abraham is in the believer’s hall of fame of Scripture as we heard in our second lesson, from Hebrews 11. How can this be? Because believer’s, including Abraham and including you and me, are only righteous in God’s sight through faith that is created and strengthened by God’s promises. Listen to Genesis 15:1-6.

¹ 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. "

² 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?" ³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

⁴ 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." ⁵ 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."

⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

When we read the Scriptures, we read the lives of real people, people like you and me. There are great saints in Scripture, men and women who gave their lives in service to the Lord, who trusted in Him when their every human inclination and instinct told them not to. There are also great sinners in Scripture, scandalous men and women: adulterers, murderers, traitors, liars, etc. But we need to make one thing clear. The saints and the sinners are not different people, but one and the same. These are sinner/saints, who one moment take the most courageous stands of faith and the next are swallowed by temptation and despair. These are people like us.

Abraham rode that rollercoaster of faith throughout his life and our lesson for today is one of the low moments. Abraham is getting antsy and nervous. “I’m getting older God, and ALL of your promises

hinge on me having a child. What's the plan God, when am I going to see some action from you! Is my servant, Eliezer, REALLY your master plan?" Here is the father of many nations, the Bible's great hero of faith, acting like an upset child or teen because mom and dad said "be patient" to one of their requests. So how did God respond to Abraham's behavior? Did he roll his eyes and say with impatience: "Abraham, we've talked about this already! I'm going to give you a son. How many times do I have to tell you that?" No, and this is the delightful thing about God, he welcomes our shamefully bold questions and is graceful in handling our doubts. This is what he did for Abraham. God said: **"This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. So shall your offspring be"** (Genesis 15:4-5). Do you see what God was doing? He wasn't just repeating the promise, he was illustrating it so that every time Abraham looked at the night sky, he wouldn't just see stars, he would see God's love for him. We have all been impatient with God, even accusing Him at some time or another of letting us down. We have been worried with how God has provided for us, whether it's our body, or what's in the refrigerator, closet, garage, or bank account. We have pinned the blame for the consequences of our sin on God, the Law-giver, and not on ourselves, the law-breakers. We have been jealous of those with better health or greater gifts. In all this, we have accused God of being less than what He claims to be: God. So how does God respond to our behavior? Does he roll his eyes and say with impatience: "We've talked about this already! I'm going to give you what I promised. How many times do I have to tell you that?" No, just like Abraham, God welcomes our shamefully bold questions and is graceful in handling our doubts. God continues to say to us: **"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom"** (Luke 12:32). Every promise of God hinges on that greatest promise – the same promise He gave to Abraham. It is the promise of a Son who was born to keep a promise, a promise that the Devil's work and activity would be crushed, death destroyed, sin forgiven, and life eternal granted. Every time we look at the cross and empty tomb of Jesus this promise is illustrated for us.

When Abraham heard God repeat His promise, and elaborate on it, we are told, **"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness"** (vs. 6, for further reading check out Romans 4:1-25). Literally, the Hebrew says Abraham "amened" God." That is what amen means: "to believe or confirm." God makes a promise and believers are led by God the Holy Spirit to say "Amen." In fact, the promises of God, are exactly the thing that causes a person to say Amen. Thank goodness for that because as your life, my life, and Abraham's life prove clearly – there are plenty of times when we are very weak in faith, strong in faith, and everywhere in between in faith. If our standing with God depended on the level of our faith – then each of us would be in serious trouble. When God looks at your life, he doesn't see weak faith, strong faith, or medium faith. He simply sees faith. And where he sees faith in the promise that the Savior Jesus would come (in Abraham's case) or the promise that the Savior Jesus did come and will come again (in the case of you and me), he credits righteousness. Not a righteousness that we have the capacity to provide, but Jesus sinless life counting as our sinless life. Not a righteousness that we have to earn, but a perfect and peaceful standing with God that Jesus earned for us through his life, death, and resurrection, the blessings of which we enjoy simply because the Holy Spirit has lead us to say "Amen" to have faith in Jesus.

Leave today speaking and living faith's "Amen." Trust that what God has said, He will do. Trust that all God does, He does for you. I know sometimes it doesn't feel that way, but when you're not feeling the faith go outside and count the stars, and when you've counted all of them, then you can give God advice on how to better keep His promises. Until then, focus on God's promises and let the Holy Spirit lead you to say - AMEN.