**Abram’s Pressing Questions, Part One** July 24, 2016

Genesis 15

Call from lady about Sooke Baptist people / Cameron

Soul Stories

**Coffee/Question**:

“A faith without some doubts is like a human body with no antibodies in it.

People who blithely go through life, too busy or indifferent to ask the hard questions about why they believe as they do, will find themselves defenceless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic.

A person's faith can collapse almost overnight, if they failed over the years to listen patiently to their own doubts, which should only be discarded after long reflection.”  ― [**Timothy Keller**](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/847789.Timothy_Keller)

What is the pressing question you would ask of God if given the opportunity?

**Feedback**

In Genesis 15, there are two questions Abram voiced to God.

This morning we want to look at the first and how God and Abram spoke with and to one another. And then next week, we will unpack Abram’s second question and God’s answer.

We learn from Psalm 139:4, that God knows what we think even before we speak.

*“Before a word is on my tongue, you, Lord, know it completely.”*

That’s how it was with Abram. God knew the questions that were troubling him.

Look at Genesis 15.

v.1 - ***“Don’t be afraid, Abram...”***

Fear has a way of gnawing away at one’s mind.

Fear can produce anxiety. It can paralyze a person.

Fear can cloud a person’s judgment.

Fear, like a fog, can roll in and envelop a person’s heart and mind, making it difficult to

perceive things rightly.

How much water do you think a dense fog covering seven city blocks, to a depth of a hundred feet contains? According to the Bureau of Standards in the United States it contains less than one glass of water. Preaching Today Citation: Brian Heckber, Southeast Christian Church.

There is not much substance to fog.

I wonder if the same could be said about the things we fear?

What do you think Abram had to be afraid of? Remember the greater context.

Abram fought Kedorlaomer and the other kings in alliance with him, and took back from them all the spoils of war they had taken.

The Mesopotamian alliance was committed to dominating the region in order to ensure they controlled the king’s highway.

Was Abram concerned they would return and take vengeance on him?

Keith Krell tells the story of what one tribe of First Nation Americans uniquely did in the training of their young braves. On the night of a boy’s thirteenth birthday, he would be blindfolded and then taken miles away. When he took off the blindfold,

he’d discover he was in the middle of a thick, dense forest…by himself…where he was to spend the night... alone.

Every time a twig snapped; every time an animal howled; every time the wind blew; the boy would wonder... is this sound coming from something that will harm me?

For many of the young braves, it would be a fear filled night. After what seemed like an eternity, the first rays of sunlight would shine down into the forest. Looking around, the boy would see flowers, trees, and the outline of the path.

Then, to his utter astonishment, his eyes would fall on the figure of his father, who had been there all night, standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow.

**https://bible.org/seriespage/19-fear-factor-genesis-151-21**

***Don’t be afraid, Abram. I am your shield.***

This word ‘shield’ can also be translated ‘sovereign.’

The point God was making is that he was Abram’s protector; that he was near; that he was in control.

The God who spoke with Abram thousands of years ago, is the same God,

you and I, love and follow.

He too is near; he too is our shield; he too is our protector.

That’s why the Bible says, ***“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*** Romans 8:31.

***Don’t be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.***

In chapter 14, Bera, the king of Sodom had offered, if Abram would release back to him the people he had rescued, all the wealth of the two cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. If Abram had accepted Bera’s offer, he would have become the billionaire of Canaan. But Abram said... no.

He had rightly discerned with the help of Melchezidek, the priest of God and the king of Salem, that there were strings attached to Bera’s offer.

If Abram had accepted Bera’s gift, at some future moment, and it wasn’t just that Bera could have; Bera would have come back and put pressure on Abram to do something for him. Bera was not the kind of person Abram wanted to be obligated to.

In light of the fact that Abram had turned down great wealth in order to remain committed to the Lord, how incredible is it that God assured him, ***“I am your very great reward.”***

Paul, writing to the church in Philippi, said nothing is of greater value than knowing Jesus. He went even further and said, that in comparison, everything else he could gain, was like worthless, was like garbage, when placed beside and compared to the treasure that Jesus is. (Philippians 3)

I like how Jim Elliott said it: *“He is no fool, who gives what he cannot keep,*

*to gain what he cannot lose.”*

Timothy Keller wrote: *“...you don't realize Jesus is all you need until Jesus is*

*all you have.”* [**Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/6592533)

Look at what Abram said in response to God - **v.2-3**.

The NLT puts it this way: “What good are all your blessings when I don’t have…a son?”

I am so glad that this response of Abram’s was included in the story of Genesis.

How many times are we like Abram? How many times do we struggle go grasp that if we have Jesus we have all that we need?

How many times have we thought; have we said to God – “what good are all your blessings when I don’t have…”

God didn’t just offer Abram a new country, or wealth, or protection.

God offered to Abram... himself.

*“I am your shield…I am your very great reward.”*

And Abram responded, *“But what can you give me... since I am childless?”*

Abram’s response seems so impertinent.

But not only does it remind us, it encourages us to likewise speak freely with God; that he won’t walk away from us, when we are slow to understand what is truly important.

The book of Psalms confirms this.

David had similar conversations with God.

God not only knows we are dust; he is incredibly patient with us.

When God allows (picture of weight on a man) challenging or difficult circumstances to happen to us; or when he delays in answering our prayer or fulfilling his promises, we, like Abram, can become frustrated, discouraged, angry, fearful, and we may begin to think of possibilities, which we can orchestrate ourselves, in order to bring about a resolution or a way forward.

It’s in such places that we need to hear again what God said through the prophet Isaiah in 55:8-9.

Abram’s solution was to adopt as his son, his chief servant, Eliezer of Damascus.

And his solution was so much less than what God intended to do.

Look at how God responded to Abram - **v.4**.

God said, *“I meant what I said to you, years ago in Ur. You will become a great nation.”*

And then, in a way that left no wiggle room for doubt or for a “second option” solutions, God said that Abram’s descendants, would not come through Eliezer, but through a son, who would be born to Sarai and him.

Look at **v.5**.

In the vision the Lord took Abram outside and told him to look up.

The point in doing this, was so that, in that moment, in addition to hearing the words of God, Abram would visually comprehend the solidness of God’s promise to him.

The stars are there. They’re real.

My promise is just as solid.

Now try and count the stars if you can.

The descendants to be born to you will be as numerous.

I also think God told Abram to look up because he wanted, in the days, months and years ahead, whenever Abram would gaze into the night sky and see the stars, to remember; to hear the echo of God’s voice, *“Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky.”*

How did Abram respond? **v.6**.

I’ve heard people say things like this: I wish my faith was stronger; or I wish I could believe like you.

Timothy Keller writes, *“It is not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that saves you. Strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch.”* [**The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2306323)

E. Stanley Jones, in his book, Christ of the Indian Road tells the story of a conversation between a doctor who lay dying and another who sat beside him, urging him to have faith in and to surrender his life to Jesus. The dying doctor listened in amazement.

Finally the light dawned in him. He said, “All my life I have been bothered with ‘what’ to believe, and now I see it is ‘who’ to trust.”

When the Bible talks of faith, it always refers to the One in whom a person trusts and believes – Jesus!

Abram believed….the LORD.

Romans 10:17: *Faith comes from hearing the message...*

Abram heard what God said to him and he believed God.

Abram had voiced to God his concerns and the conclusion he had come up with after looking at his options. And God said, “You don’t have it right. I assure you - you will have a child!”

When God said that…Abram’s circumstances hadn’t changed.

Sarai was still unable to have a child.

But Abram was convinced she would.

His faith was not a blind leap into the dark, but a decision to trust the One who had made himself known to him, and who had promised, “You will have a child.”

Faith believes God.

Romans 4:21 says, *“Abram was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises.”*

What did God do in response to Abram’s belief? **v.6b**.

Abram was **“credited”**with righteousness.

The word “credit” (*chashab*) means, “credit to an account.”

In the business world, when a debit is balanced by a credit, the account is considered to be “paid in full.”

Why did God credit Abram with righteousness?

What had Abram done? Nothing!

No sacrifice.

No pilgrimage.

No great act of goodness.

He simply had believed God.

Could Abram have become righteous by his own effort?

Can anyone become righteous by the good things they do?

The story of the Bible tells us no.

It wasn’t that Abram was incapable of doing good things.

It was that he couldn’t do enough.

It’s the same with you and I.

Our sin is a spiritual debt we cannot pay. In that regard, we all are spiritually bankrupt.

But God in his goodness, cancels our debt and credits us with righteousness, as he did with Abram, when we place our faith in him, believing Jesus Christ to be his solution to our sin problem.

To anyone and to everyone who does so, God writes across the ledger, as it were, “paid in full.”

Bob Deffinbaugh writes, *“God’s way of saving men and women is not new. It has not changed from Old to New Testament times. Always, God has saved men and women by grace, through faith. There is no other way. While Abram was saved by faith in the One Who would come, we are saved by faith in Jesus Who has come.”*

https://bible.org/seriespage/16-focal-point-abram-s-faith-genesis-151-21

Like it was with Abram, God can more than handle your questions; your doubts; your seemingly impossible circumstances.

You will find, just like everyone else who has come to him, that his patience and kindness is greater than your frustration, disappointment, doubt.

His grace is greater than your sin debt.

Are you beginning to see how he has pursued you?

In Jesus he has made the first move.

And now he waits for your response.

I would urge you to choose to believe him as Abram did.

Come home to him.

**The Blessing**

Romans 10:9-10

Romans 11:33-36

“Those who believe they have pleased God by the quality of their devotion and moral goodness naturally feel that they and their group deserve deference and power over others. The God of Jesus and the prophets, however, saves completely by grace. He cannot be manipulated by religious and moral performance--he can only be reached through repentance, through the giving up of power. If we are saved by sheer grace we can only become grateful, willing servants of God and of everyone around us.”   
― [**Timothy Keller**](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/847789.Timothy_Keller), [**The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2306323)

“God's salvation does not come in response to a changed life. A changed life comes in response to the salvation, offered as a free gift.”   
― [**Timothy Keller**](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/847789.Timothy_Keller), [**Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/6592533)