

August 7, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

There is no need to worry. You can trust God's Word.

You've finally found the coffeemaker you were looking for. It had all the features you wanted a good price. Before you click "purchase," though, you notice that are two reviews of it. The first review gave it one star, the lowest rating, and complained that it was poor quality and broke quickly. The other review gave it five stars, the best rating, and explained that it was excellent quality that was very durable. Which review do you trust? Do you buy it?

Here in Genesis 15, Abram was facing a difficult dilemma. Abram is the famous fellow we know as Abraham, but at this point in his life he was called Abram. Four thousand years ago, not terribly long after the Lord destroyed the world with a flood, people were wandering away from God again. In order to preserve the promise of a Savior, God decided to connect that promise to one family and his descendants. When Abram was 75 years old and his wife Sarai (later called Sarah) was 65 years old, God promised that he would bless Abram and that the Savior of the world would come from his family tree. Ten years later, Abram and Sarai still did not have a son and it seemed as if they never would. Sarai's biological clock had stopped ticking.

Abram could not figure out how he and Sarai could have a son. Doubt was beginning to nag at Abram's heart. He was troubled, confused and concerned. Instead of scolding Abram for not trusting him more, the Lord stooped down to Abram's level and gently encouraged his faltering faith. He appeared to Abram in a vision and said (:1), **"Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."** The Lord was going to protect Abram and bless him abundantly. Then the Lord patiently listened as Abram vented all of his fears in verses 2 and 3. Abram complained that Sarai was too old to have a child and when he died, his chief servant, named Eliezer, would inherit all of his estate. (It was customary that if the owner did not have a son, then the chief servant inherited everything.) Abram was a worried, troubled, concerned and confused.

The Lord could have yelled, "How dare you doubt my power. I am God and I can do anything. I gave you my Word and that is all you need." Instead, he gently repeated his promise that Abram and Sarai would have a son from their own flesh and blood. To make his promise more tangible, he told Abram to look outside to try to count all of the stars. I have heard that under the right conditions, your eyes can see about 6000 stars. But we know that there are LOTS more stars than that. Scientists have no idea how many stars there are. And that's the point that the Lord was making. "Abram, you are

going to have a son and he will have a son and on and on until your family tree is so full of people that no one can get an accurate guess at how many descendants you will have."

Verse 6 is one worth memorizing. **"Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."** In the English language, the word "believe" is used in different meanings. Sometimes, people use the word "believe" to express a wish or hope, as in, "'I believe the Brewers will win the World Series this year.'" Others use the word "believe" to express a determined mindset as in, "I believe I am going to lose 10 pounds by dieting," As if it was going to automatically happen just because you were so determined. One of the doctors I have seen over the last few years told me, "You're a pastor. This is where your faith kicks in. You just got to believe that you are going to get better." I wanted to say, "Get behind me, Satan." Instead, I mumbled, "It does not work that way."

Sadly, many churches misuse the word "believe" to refer to something that we do. "You have got to believe. Give your heart to Jesus." They change the meaning of "believe" into an intellectual decision we make. WRONG! The Bible uses the word "believe" to describe what has happened inside someone's heart. Think of it this way. When a pilot is going to land his plane, he flips the switch that lowers the landing gear. When the landing gear is locked in place, a green light shines in the cockpit. The pilot can not see the landing gear, but the green light lets him know that it is safe to land the plane. That green light did not make the landing gear lower. The green light is just an indication of what has happened to the landing gear. Believing, or faith, is not something we do. Belief, or trust in the heart, is an indication that of what the Holy Spirit has done inside of our hearts. When it says that (:6), **"Abram believed,"** it simply means that the Holy Spirit did his work in Abram's heart. Abram was believing. The point is that Abram did not DO anything. Through his promise God strengthened Abram's faith.

Now for the rest of verse 6, **"he credited it to him as righteousness."** This is mind-blowing. This is the heart and core of salvation. There are really only two kinds of religion – one says that salvation is a free gift where God does everything for us and the other kind says that salvation is something you have to earn by doing something. If salvation depends on us in any way then we are in trouble. All of know how often we messed things up in our life. But if salvation is something that God does for us, then you can be sure. Twice, the Apostle Paul quoted Genesis 15:6 as proof that we are saved through faith, simple trust in the heart, not by ANY works. Abram believed what God said and through his faith, God gave Abram credit for being righteous. As humans created by God, God has every right to expect us to be holy, righteous, perfect. Obviously, none of us is perfect, not even Abram.

During his time on this earth, Jesus lived the perfect life that God was looking for. Jesus was holy and righteous. Through faith, simple trust in the heart, God gave Abram and you credit for the perfect life that Jesus lived. That's like someone else going to work and being a perfect employee, but putting your name at the top of his time card so you get the paycheck and promotion. God gives you more than a paycheck and promotion, though. He gives you the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. No matter what sin, no matter how often, no matter how shameful, each and every sin is forgiven. Your record with God is spotless and you will be promoted to live with all the holy people in heaven. All of that is yours simply through faith that the Holy Spirit worked in your heart. St. Paul explained, "**No one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' [be a believer] except by the Holy Spirit.**"

The Lord made a number of promises to Abram. He promised that a great nation and the Savior would come from his family tree, that his offspring would be as numerous as the dust of the earth, that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan as far as he could see. Abram did not see all of God's promises fulfilled. Six chapters later, Sarai did give birth to Isaac and laughed with joy. But Abram never saw his family tree grow into millions of people nor did he see his descendants living in Canaan. As we look back into history, however, we can see that God did keep all of his promises to Abram. We can trust what God says. Abram was a bit worried, troubled, concerned and confused. But through his Word, the Lord strengthened Abram's faith.

Have there ever been times in your life when you were a bit worried, troubled, concerned and confused? Maybe I should ask the question this way; Has there ever been a time in your life when you were not a bit worried, troubled, concerned or confused? The Lord made some promises to Abram and he made some promises to us as well. He has NOT promised that we will have a child when we are 90 or 100 years old. I'm guessing we're OK with that. He has not given us his Word that we can walk on water like he gave his Word to Peter. Nor has God promised that we will be healthy, wealthy and wise if we go to church and pray hard enough. He has not given us his Word that life will be pain free or that everyone will like us or that we'll always love our job and get lots of money, or that we'll have the perfect country if the right people get elected and the right laws are passed. There are a lot of things that we may wish for, but God has not promised them to us so we can not expect them.

The Lord, however, has promised far greater things than health and wealth. He has promised us free forgiveness, daily mercy, the assurance that everything that happens to us works toward our eventual and eternal good, angel protection, answered prayers, strength for each moment, love, peace in a

world filled with war and hatred and on and on, especially a place by his side in heaven. God has promised us those things, but we do not always see them, just as Abram did not see all of his promises fulfilled. Quite often, we hurt and struggle and stress.

The Lord knows what your fears and worries are. Maybe you have issues with your house or car or computer or job or family. Maybe your health is slowly failing you and there is nothing the doctors can do to help and the future looks very dark indeed. Maybe you feel unloved and lonely. Maybe the news headlines make you want to bury your head in the sand. Instead of yelling at us, "How dare you doubt my Word," in absolute love, the Lord stoops down to your level and asks you, "What's bothering you? Tell me about it." He lets you unwind on him and pour out your problems to him. He is not too busy watching over the universe to give you individual attention. He cares about you more than a mother cares about her newborn child, if you can imagine a love that strong. The Lord not only knows your fear, he is also able and eager to take your fear away.

When Abram was insecure and worried, the Lord strengthened his faith by speaking to him. The Lord also uses his Word to strengthen our faith when we are insecure and worried. Every time that you connect with God's Word and hear the promise of his forgiving love in Christ, you are charging up your faith battery. You may not feel anything, not even warm glow in your heart, but God promises that his Word will not return to him empty.

Will you buy that new coffeemaker? Which review can you trust? I don't know. But when God speaks, you can trust what he says even if you do not see all of his promises fulfilled. For added assurance, we can even look back to see how the Lord did fulfill all of his promises to Abram. We can also look at the birds of the air and other things in nature as proof that God keeps his Word. Through faith, doubt and despair are replaced with the certainty of God's promises. Worry is replaced with trust. The fear of death is replaced with the promise of eternal life. When the storms of life blow hard, when you are weary and burdened, when it seems as if God has forgotten you, when death is knocking on your door, you can say, "Be still my soul. There is no need to worry. You can trust God's Word. Amen."